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The Grand Street Gold-Dust Sharpers.



THAD TURNED HIS EYES UPON THE JEW, AND HE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE ASTONISHED IF HE HAD SEEN
HIS SATANIC MAJESTY STANDING BEFORE HIM.

THE

Grand Street Gold-Dust Sharpers;

OR,

Shadowing Sheeny Sam's Silent Seven.

BY HAROLD PAYNE.

CHAPTER I.

DROPPED FROM SIGHT.

"SCUSE me, gentlemen, kin you tell me where I kin find this place? I've been trampin' all round these diggins' fer the last hour, an' I can't find no sich number."

The speaker was a typical "hayseed" or countryman—a tall, angular man with a sunburnt complexion, chin-whiskers of a dirty-yellowish color, slightly tinged with gray, a slouch hat, long duster, and a remarkably large valise of the cheap variety.

The persons addressed were a couple of well-dressed young men with shiny silk hats and snowy shirt-fronts, ablaze with diamonds. They were both rather good-looking young fellows, but somewhat different in appearance.

One was tall and slender, with brown hair, inclined to curl, and a handsome mustache of the same color, while the other was somewhat shorter, of fair complexion, blond hair and mustache, somewhat stout, with a round, jolly face which wore a perpetual smile.

They were standing on the corner of Grand street and the Bowery when the countryman approached them, and as he made the above inquiry he held a paper toward them.

The stout man took it, with a good-natured smile and, after glancing at it, chuckled softly and handed it to the tall man.

The latter also smiled, but somewhat cynically, as he examined the paper, and then returning it to the farmer, remarked:

"Why, yes, my good man, we can direct you to this number, and it is rather fortunate that you struck us, for there is not one person in a thousand in this neighborhood that knows where the place is. You have doubtless been to No. —."

"Yas," rejoined the countryman, "but this hiar says —12, an' I can't find no sich number."

"That is not strange," replied the tall young man. "You see, the place you want is on the top or fourth floor of the building, which is divided in two parts, and the gentleman occupying this part has added the half number to distinguish his section from the party on the other side of the partition. We probably would not have been acquainted with this fact if it hadn't happened that we occupy the first half of the floor—while Mr. Einstein, the gentleman you want, has the other half. We are going up now, and will show you how to get up to the other place."

"Thankee! an' I'm very much ableeged."

"Don't mention it, my good man. We are always glad to be of service to any one, especially strangers in the city."

"Always delighted," echoed the short man, with another chuckle.

With that the tall man led the way, and the three turned their steps to a number about the center of the block, where they entered a door and disappeared from view—at least to the outer world.

Of all the throng that moved along the two great thoroughfares, there was but one man who took the slightest notice of the foregoing scene, and that was a gentleman on the opposite side of the street. At least he had been on the opposite side when the countryman approached the sleek young fellows, but, true to his instinct, as soon as he noticed this much, his suspicions were aroused that all was not right, and he sauntered in an unconcerned way across the street and concealed himself in the recess of a doorway where he could see and hear what was passing without danger of being discovered himself.

It was between seven and eight in the evening, and the streets were thronged with pedestrians, who went hurrying by, and, as I have said, paid no attention to what was passing between the three men.

As soon as the trio started for the number mentioned, Detective Burr (for he it was, Thad Burr, the famous Headquarters Special) followed them at a cautious distance and saw them enter the street-door.

And, having seen this much, the astute detective was more fully convinced than ever that something was wrong; so, after a moment's hesitation, he opened the door, which was not locked, and looked in. A dim lamp partially lighted the hall and showed a stairway leading to the next floor, and also showed that there was no other way of getting up, there being no elevator.

He listened, and could hear footsteps on the stairs above, but the men had already passed out of sight in the gloom that prevailed above the first story.

Without delay, he ascended the first flight but could go no further, as the door at the foot of the next stairway was locked.

Again he listened, and could hear the men going on up, and could also hear the sound of voices, but there was no such thing as following them, and therefore concluding that, no matter whether his suspicions were well founded or not, he could do nothing about it, he returned to the street.

Once there, he again concealed himself in a doorway where he could watch the entrance to the building, and took up his vigil. He kept the doorway in view for more than two hours, and still nobody issued forth, and at length abandoned the watch and returned to the corner of the street where he had first seen the men. He stood there for some moments, undecided what action to take, when his eye fell upon a folded paper lying in the gutter.

Ordinarily it would not have attracted his attention, for there was nothing unusual in its appearance, but for some unaccountable reason, he stooped and picked up this particular paper and mechanically unfolded it.

He glanced over its contents in the same mechanical way, his thoughts being too much abstracted by the recollection of the late scene to allow him to understand what he read, until he had perused more than half of it, when he suddenly came upon something that caused him to start, pause, and finally go back and read the document from the beginning. This is what he found:

"MR. HARRISON W. HIGGINS,

"*Bolivar, Missouri:*—

"DEAR SIR:—Replying to yours of 15th inst., would state that goods are ready for delivery, and you can get them at any time you may call. It will be necessary for you to call in person, as we cannot risk sending by mail or Express. Not that the goods are not genuine, for they are, but the manner in which they were obtained, renders it necessary for us to be most cautious, no less on your account than our own. If you find it necessary to make inquiries in order to find our place, be very sure that a policeman does not hear you. Also be careful that a policeman does not see you enter our place. For the latter reason, it will be better for you to call in the evening, say between seven and eight o'clock.

"If you could let us know the exact time at which you would reach the city, we could have some of our people out to meet you. However, if no one meets you at the ferry, come direct to Grand street, and if you have any difficulty in finding the number, you will doubtless see some one about who can direct you.

"As we told you before, there is a great fortune in this business, and you had better not miss it. We could name dozens in your very township who have grown rich in this way, and nobody is the wiser.

"Hoping to see you soon, we are,

"Very truly yours,

"S. EINSTEIN & Co."

The letter was type-written, and bore the number and street which the old hayseed had inquired for, which left no doubt in the detective's mind that the missive was the identical one he had seen in the old fellow's possession, and which he had dropped some time between his meeting with the young men and his departure with them.

"A case of 'green-goods,'" mused Burr, "or some other similar game, and another

fool taken in by New York sharpers. But, let him go," he continued, as he strolled along. "These Reubens will bite at the bait thrown out to them by the swindlers, and it is no business of mine to follow them up."

But as he continued on his walk, he still continued to reflect upon the subject.

He could not imagine, after all, that this was a green-goods deal, for the letter was not worded as they usually are in such deals. The green-goods sharp is particular about calling attention to the fact that the money is so well executed that it will deceive the greatest expert, but he never claims that it is *genuine*, as this one did.

Therefore, this must be some new game to swindle the greenhorn, of which he had not heard, and Thad decided to see and have a talk with Superintendent Byrnes regarding it.

It was but a short walk from where he then was to 300 Mulberry street, the chief's headquarters, and it did not take him long to reach them.

Fortunately the superintendent had been delayed at his office later than usual, and was still in; and, still more fortunately, he had just got through with his work, and was ready to listen to his favorite Special.

"Well, old fellow, what's in the wind now?" demanded the superintendent, grasping the great detective's proffered hand.

"I have just unearthed a new species of swindle, I believe, superintendent," replied Thad, as he settled into a chair.

"A new one?" laughed Byrnes, "I thought they had got about to the end of invention."

"It seems not. I may be mistaken in my hypothesis, but I believe I have struck a new one."

"What makes you think so?"

"Read that," and Burr handed him the letter he had picked up in the gutter.

The superintendent took the letter and glanced over it hastily and smiled.

"What do you think of it?" inquired Thad, as the reader looked up.

"Nothing new, Thad," replied Byrnes, with a low laugh. "That is a game that we have known about for some time, but have failed thus far to capture any of the perpetrators."

"What is the game?"

"It is known among the sharps and police as the 'gold-dust game.' These swindlers send out circulars all over the country to men whose addresses they obtain in some manner, claiming to have a large amount of gold-dust and nuggets which has come into their possession in some mysterious and questionable way, and which they are willing to dispose of for about one-fourth its value, and it will not be safe for them to try to sell it here in the city. This catches the hayseed who is dishonest himself and willing to make money in a questionable manner, and he comes on to meet his correspondent."

"And gets taken in, eh?"

"Certainly. He is taken into a room somewhere and shown a bag of real gold-dust. His eyes glisten at the sight of the shining metal, and he is soon persuaded to part with his good money in exchange for a few little bags of the stuff, which, when he gets it home, turns out to be brass-fillings."

"Is there no way of breaking up the operations of these fellows?" asked Thad seriously.

"I hope to be able to in time, but so far they have shrewdly managed to elude me."

"Now that you have the number of this particular one, why not sent a squad up and raid the place?"

"That I shall do. But, the chances are ten to one that by the time the police arrive there won't be a soul on the premises."

With that the superintendent touched a bell, which was soon answered by an attendant.

"Tell Captain Nolan to come here," commanded the chief.

A moment later the officer made his appearance.

"Captain, take a detail of half a dozen men and go to No. — Grand street, and raid the place."

"Very well, superintendent," answered the officer; "what's there, though?"

"Some sort of a gold-dust game, I think."

Find out what it is, if possible, and arrest whoever you find on the premises."

"It might be as well to tell you," interposed Burr, "that the joint, whatever it is, is on the fourth floor."

"On the fourth floor, Nolan, you understand," explained the superintendent.

"Yes, sir," replied the officer, saluting the chief, and withdrawing.

"As I said," resumed Byrnes, as soon as the captain was gone, "ten to one they will find nobody about the place. This is the manner of these chaps. As soon as they make a haul, they disappear, and the next day have their headquarters at the other end of the town, so that it is the merest luck if they are caught. In the mean time, if you like, you might keep an eye on the place, and also look out for any suspicious characters in the neighborhood."

"There are two parties I shall look out for, at least," rejoined the detective. And then he proceeded to relate what he had seen at the junction of the Bowery and Grand street.

"Yes, they have the appearance, from your description, of the typical pullers-in of these places," observed Byrnes, referring to the two young men Thad described as those he had seen in company with the old farmer. "They may be the operators also, but the chances are that the real proprietor of the game never shows himself in a business capacity on the street. This 'S. Einstein' may be an *alias*, but I shouldn't wonder if it were my old friend Samuel, who passes under as many *aliases* as he has hairs on his head, but is known to the fraternity and the police as 'Sheeny Sam,' and is one of the slickest rascals in the city. He has been arrested many times, but always manages to get off on some technicality or other. But it wouldn't be a bad idea to watch out for the two you saw, and there may be a chance of catching the old fellow through them. It will be a big feather in your cap, Thad, if you can capture Sheeny Sam, and I believe you can do it, if any mortal can."

"Thanks. I'll do my best."

"I know you will, Thad, and that means a great deal. But be sure you have a good strong case against Sam before you lay hands on him, for he has got off so often that he thinks there is no such thing as convicting him."

"I'll get a case against him," promised the detective, "if I have to disguise as a hayseed myself and get into his confidence in that way. By the way, has this fellow ever been charged with anything as serious as murder?"

"Yes, several times. One of his victims was found murdered not more than a year ago, and, although the evidence pointed pretty direct to him and his gang, nothing could be proven exactly. Oh, you've got a slick customer to deal with, Thad."

"So it would seem, but I've had some of the kind before to day, superintendent, as you have reason to know."

"So you have, Thad, so you have, and you have no failure recorded against you so far."

When Burr took his leave of the superintendent, he returned with all possible haste to the place on Grand street where the raiding was to take place.

A glance toward the upper floors of the building showed it to be in total darkness, and there was no sound of anything going on.

He crossed over, and was about enter the building by the door he had entered before, when the door opened and the identical young men whom he had seen on the street a few hours before came out, but the hayseed was not with them.

They glanced curiously, suspiciously, Thad thought, at him, as they passed out, and then hastened along the street in the direction of Broadway.

Burr stepped into the now totally dark hallway (the lamp had been turned out during his absence) and made a few changes in his face, put on a beard and a pair of glasses, and again stepping forth in time to catch sight of the young men before they had gone far, started in pursuit.

Scarcely had he got outside the door, when Captain Nolan and his detail came down the stairs and out of the building.

"Another fake," growled the officer, ad-

ressing his men. "If the superintendent would pay less attention to the advice of these fly detectives, he would get along just as well. They are always discovering dens that never turn out to be anything."

CHAPTER III.

SOLID PROOF.

BURR laughed to himself when he heard the police captain's comment, for he knew that it meant failure on the grumbler's part to make the capture he had gone there for, which was an exemplification of the superintendent's prophecy.

But the thing which puzzled the detective was, how the sharpers had managed to elude the police so cleverly, and what had become of the old hayseed.

He had no time, however, to consider either very closely, for other business was now on hand.

The young men were still walking off in the distance, and Thad was but a short way behind them, and disguised in such a manner that they would never have dreamed him to be the same man they had seen as they had come out of the building a few minutes before.

The two continued on their course as far as Broadway, and there boarded an up-town car.

This necessitated a little more haste on Burr's part, and he was compelled to strike into a run in order to catch the same car. To prevent all possibility of their recognizing him, he remained on the rear platform, and had a good view of the suspects on the inside of the car.

They kept on up-town as far as Fourteenth, where they left the car, and Thad followed their example.

The young men turned west, and went as far as Sixth avenue, where they again turned up-town, walked to Fifteenth, turned west once more, and stopped in the middle of the block.

One of the men ascended the stoop and rung the bell, while the other remained on the sidewalk. The door was presently opened, and the young man held a conversation with the person who came to the door, which lasted some minutes, and finally the young man returned to his companion on the sidewalk and the door closed.

The two on the street then had a lengthy confab, in an undertone, which Thad could not understand, although he was but a few feet away, concealed behind the stoop.

A few minutes later the door opened, and some one came out.

As he descended the stoop Burr saw that it was a middle-aged man, and from the contour of his face, which the shadower could see outlined against the sky, he was seen to be a Hebrew.

Thad started with surprise.

Could it be the man of whom Byrnes had spoken—*Sheeny Sam*?

It was very dark at this point of the street, but as the man reached the sidewalk, he struck a match and lighted a cigar, whereby the detective had a perfect view of his face.

There was no doubt about the nationality of the man, and it was plain that he was pretty well to do, if diamonds counted for anything. The two young men's array of blazing stones was nothing compared with what this man wore.

As soon as he reached the others he put his hands on their shoulders in a familiar way and said:

"Vell, poys, ve are ready. V'ich vay?"

"We had better go down and attend to the matter I spoke to you about," replied the taller one of the two, who was the same who had rung the bell. "The police are nosing about there, and if they happen to find anything there will be the deuce to pay."

"You t'ink dere vas a chance of de bolice f'inding it?" inquired the Jew in a good-natured voice, and in such a matter-of-fact tone that had not Thad suspected what they were talking about, he would have imagined it to be some trivial matter.

"There is a good deal of chance of finding it," rejoined the tall man.

"How vas you so careless, mine poys?"

"Careless?" growled the other peevishly.

"We were not careless, but there was no time to do anything more than we did. You

see, the cops were in the building, and we had enough to do to save our own bacon by making a sneak the usual way."

"You don't mean to dell me dat you didn't covered it at all?" cried the Jew, in a tone of horror.

"Oh, yes, we did that much, but it wouldn't take much of a beak to find it."

"Vas dere any plood scadderd about?"

"Oh, no. We don't do things quite so clumsily as that."

"I should hobe not. Anoder t'ing. If de bolice vas nosing about as you say, idt von't be save for us to go dere anyway."

"What will we do then?"

"Keeb away."

"But we expect another to night."

"Vell, can't you meet him on de sidevark, as you did de udder von? V'at's de matter?"

"Yes, we can do that, but if the police find anything, it will be unsafe for us any place in the neighborhood."

"Dat ish so, dat ish so," mused the Jew. "Vell, dere ish but von t'ing to pe done, and dat is to see de Seven, und have dem take sharge of t'ings. Ve go dere now. Come."

And off they put.

As soon as it was safe, Burr started in pursuit, and kept them in sight until they reached Broadway, but here, instead of taking a car, as the others had done, the Jew called a carriage and the trio got in.

Fortunately cabs were plentiful about the Square, and it did not take the detective long to get into another and order the driver to keep the first one in sight.

The first carriage drove direct toward Third avenue, crossed it, and continued on down toward the East River until it reached Avenue D, and here turned down-town for a short distance and stopped. The three men alighted and walked for a short distance and entered a tenement-house.

The character of the house was indexed by the fact that the ground floor was occupied as a low saloon, and if there had still existed any doubt about it, the people whom Thad met on the stairs would have convinced him.

Burr climbed the first flight of stairs, which were in almost total darkness, but was astonished and disconcerted on reaching the first landing to find the two young men standing there, while the Jew had gone on up the next flight.

From the way in which the men eyed him as he came up, he felt that they either recognized him or suspected. Still the detective determined to make a bold strike, and walked on up as though he had not seen them, and was about to push by, when one of them stepped in front of him, and growled:

"Well, what do you want up here?"

"I live up here," replied Thad, in desperation.

"I guess not," laughed the other, "and the best thing you can do is to get down as soon as your legs will let you, if you want to get out with a whole skin!"

Having become somewhat accustomed to the half-twilight of the hall by this time, he saw that both men held revolvers in their hands, and realized that it would be folly for him to dispute the case any further, so, making a profound bow to his detainers, he said:

"Thanks, gentlemen, thanks awfully," and turning, went down-stairs again.

Returning to the street, he slipped into a dark doorway, and made another change in his make-up. Removing the black whiskers, he replaced them with a pair of gray ones and put a white wig upon his head.

Then tossing the derby hat he had on away, he drew forth an old slouch hat and put it on instead. One more change, and he was completely transformed. This was to remove his coat, which was made double for just such emergencies, and turning it wrong side out, put it on again.

He then returned to the doorway of the tenement and waited just outside.

He had not long to wait before the two young men came down and passed out without noticing him. The Jew did not appear, and the moment the two men were out of the way Thad stepped inside and went up the stairs at a few bounds. He did not pause at the first landing, but kept on up the next two, he having concluded that the Jew had gone to the top of the house.

When he reached the top, Burr paused and listened, but could hear nothing. He could see a light shining through the key-hole of one of the doors, and guessed some one was in there, so he put his ear to the door, but still no sound came to him.

He walked to the back end of the hall, where there was a badly dilapidated window, and looked out. He had no difficulty in doing this, as the upper-half of the sash was gone. He was gratified to see that there was a fire-escape balcony extending across two of the windows of the tenement, but it was some four feet from the hall window, and it would be no easy job to reach it.

Thad looked about the hall for something with which to form a bridge, but there was nothing to be found, and he finally returned to the window again.

He was determined not to be foiled by a small difficulty, and removed the lower half of the sash. Then getting out on the ledge, he balanced himself for a moment and made a spring for the balcony. The leap was a dangerous one, especially in the darkness, but fortunately he caught on the railing with his hands, and was not long in pulling himself up and climbing upon the balcony.

The shutters were closed, but by turning the slats he could see into the tenement, and a strange sight met his gaze.

Seated about a table were eight men, one of which was the Jew, and the other seven appeared to be rather rough characters without being entirely depraved. In fact, they looked as if they might be workmen, but the strangest thing about it, was the fact that they were apparently conversing by means of the deaf-and-dumb alphabet, and the Jew was conversing with them. Not a sound issued from any of their lips, and the detective understood now why he had heard nothing when he put his ear to the door.

A number of bottles sat on the table, and occasionally the men would, one after another, pour out a glass of liquor and drink it, but the Jew was never seen to touch anything.

Burr had not watched this strange scene more than ten minutes, when the Jew arose from the table and made a gesture which seemed to mean that he wanted them to go somewhere, and that in a hurry, so the others arose, and began to prepare to depart.

A few moments later the whole party filed out of the door.

Then Thad realized that he was in a tight place.

It would be impossible for him to get back to the window from which he had jumped, a thing he had not considered before leaving it, and the question was how he was to get out of the place.

As soon as the men had departed he tried the shutter, and found it locked on the inside. This did not bother him much, however, as it was very old and rotten and he had little difficulty in tearing it away.

His next trouble was to open the window, which was also locked, but having recourse to a long, thin knife which he always carried, he slipped the blade between the sashes and soon had the latch reversed and the window up.

Burr did not stop long enough to take much notice of the room into which he had come, but he could not help remarking that it was well furnished, which he could see by the lamp which the strange tenants had left on the table, but turned very low.

The room into which he had come was evidently the kitchen, and he could not see into the next room, as it was in total darkness. After taking a hurried glance about the place, he was about taking his leave, when his attention was attracted by an inscription over the door, which read:

"THE SILENT SEVEN."

"Who passes this door, unless a friend,
Had best prepare to meet his end."

Thad's curiosity was now thoroughly aroused, and as he had delayed so long already that his men would be out of sight, he decided to look about a little and see what sort of a place he had got into.

Turning up the wick of the lamp so that it illuminated the room to its fullest extent, he again glanced about him.

The flat had been fitted up regardless of expense, and was furnished accordingly. A

rich sideboard contained a supply of liquors and was ablaze with the finest cut-glass.

Taking up the lamp he next visited the front room, passing through two smaller chambers which were used as bedrooms, to reach it. This apartment was also elegantly furnished, and the walls were covered with all kinds of fire-arms, pistols, carbines, swords and muskets.

On several pieces of plate and the hilts of swords and daggers, he saw the same inscription, "The Silent Seven," inscribed. In fact, in every direction the inscription was to be seen. This filled the detective with wonder and amazement.

What could it mean? Was it possible that this band of outlaws were all deaf mutes, or was this affected for a purpose?

So much absorbed had he become in the contemplation of the strange and costly objects to be met with on all sides, that he forgot for the instant where he was, and the peril he was probably in, until he was startled and brought to his senses by the sound of footsteps outside the door in the hall.

And then, before he had time for a second thought, he was further startled by hearing a key in the lock of the main door.

What was to be done?

It was too late to escape, then, and the only alternative was to find some place of concealment. But where?

He still held the lamp, which he had brought from the kitchen, and he hastily placed it on a table, and then looked about for some place of concealment.

In one corner of the room there was a door which had the appearance of the entrance to a closet, and Thad reached it at a bound. The door was not locked, and he opened it and stepped inside, after which he closed the door.

He was not an instant too soon, for the succeeding second some one entered the room.

From the sound of his footsteps the newcomer appeared to be alone, which was not only surprising but gratifying to the detective. After walking about the room for a minute or two, the person took up the lamp and retired to the kitchen.

This Thad knew from the disappearance of the light, and hearing the footsteps as they receded in the distance.

This was his opportunity for escape, he thought, and he determined to lose no time in taking advantage of it.

Pushing open the closed door, he stepped out, and in another moment was at the door. It was very dark in the room, the only light being that which came from the kitchen, but he had no trouble in finding the knob. He gave it a twist, but only to discover that the door was locked, and what was worse, the key was gone!

The detective was in a dilemma. There was no such thing as breaking the lock without attracting the man in the kitchen. And just then an idea occurred to him. Perhaps the man was like the other seven, or perhaps he was one of them, and could not hear. With this idea in his head, he decided to try to break the lock. But before he had made a move in the direction, he heard the fellow returning to the front room. Thad's first thought was to stand his ground and fight it out with him, if necessary, but upon second thought, he concluded to return to his place of concealment, and thereby perhaps learn something which he desired to know.

The next instant the detective was in the closet again and the door closed, and almost at the same instant the man came into the room, but this time approached the closet. Thad crowded as far to one end of the closet as possible, and as he did so, his hand came in contact with something cold and clammy. Horrors! It was the hand of a corpse!

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

BURR had no more than made the horrible discovery, when the person who had come into the room opened the door of the closet.

The detective had been too much agitated by his recent discovery to be prepared for this new surprise, or he might have been ready to meet the intruder in a different way from what he did.

It made no difference, however, for the

man was as little prepared to meet him as he was to meet the man. In fact, less so, for it was evident from the fellow's actions that he had not the least idea that there was a living man in the place.

He had left the lamp in the kitchen, so that the room was in partial darkness, and when he opened the closet door and saw Thad's face, he uttered a cry of terror and sprung back several feet.

But his terror at beholding him standing in the closet was nothing compared with what it was when, a second later, the detective stepped out of the closet and faced him.

Burr could see his face but indistinctly, but he could discern enough to see that it was as white as death.

He also appeared too much frightened to move, and stood staring at what he evidently believed to be an apparition or ghost as if his eyes would burst from their sockets.

Neither spoke for some moments, and then Thad said:

"Well, sir, you've had a pretty good look at me, what do you think of me?"

To his utter surprise, instead of making any reply, the fellow turned and fled into the back room with all the speed he possessed.

Believing that he had taken this method of securing an advantage over the detective, the latter hastened to follow him, and reached the kitchen a few seconds after he did.

If the fellow had appeared frightened in the darkness, now that he could be seen in the light, he was ghastly with terror.

He stood trembling like an aspen, his eyes, wild and staring, fixed upon Thad.

The spectacle was so ludicrous that Burr could not refrain from laughing, and followed it by asking:

"What are you afraid of, my good man?"

Instead of replying, the fellow, who was evidently somewhat reassured by the detective's kindly manner, smiled faintly and put his finger alternately to his lips and then his ear, as much as to indicate that he was deaf and dumb.

Burr was an adept in the deaf and dumb alphabet, and at once set to conversing with him on his fingers.

"Are you one of the Silent Seven?" was his first question.

"Yes," replied the mute.

"Where are the others?"

"I do not know."

"You mean that you dare not tell?"

No reply.

"Did you not go out with them a little while ago?"

"Yes."

"How is it that you came back instead of remaining with them?"

A shake of the head and a shrug of the shoulders, but no reply.

"You had better answer me, or I shall be compelled to arrest and lock you up!"

Another shrug.

"Who are you, anyway?"

"The Silent Seven," the fellow spelled on his fingers, and as if to emphasize it, pointed to the inscription over the door.

"I understand that," observed Burr, "but who are you? What is your business, the object of your organization? Or are you brothers?"

"We are brothers," was the reply.

"Brothers in flesh, or in crime?"

"We are brothers."

Thad lost his patience.

"Come!" he spelled out, "you shall answer my questions, or I will lock you up! I am a detective!"

The fellow only smiled.

The detective grasped him by the arm with one hand and took up the lamp with the other, and walked him as if he had been a child, into the front room.

He now discovered that the fellow was extremely slight and little stronger than a boy of fifteen, although it was evident that he was in the neighborhood of forty.

Reaching the front room, the detective strode with his prisoner up to the closet and threw back the door which stood half ajar, exposing the ghastly corpse.

Then freeing the hand with which he had led the mute, he first pointed at the ghastly object, and then spelled the words:

"What does this mean, sir?"

To his utter astonishment, instead of evinc-

ing any agitation, the mute smiled, shrugged his shoulders and shook his head as much as to say he knew all about it, but did not care to tell.

"Where did this corpse come from, and what are you doing with it here?" Burr demanded.

"I do not know," was the cool reply, spelled on the mute's fingers, while he placidly regarded the corpse. "Very good one, though, don't you think so?"

"Very good one?" cried Thad in horror, and then remembering that the exclamation was lost on the mute, spelled the words on his fingers.

"Yes, very good subject," rejoined the other. "Not too fat, solid flesh, firm muscles, all that."

Burr was sickened by the fellow's horrible indifference, and was about to denounce him for his heartlessness, when an idea occurred to him.

"See here, my good fellow, do you make a business of procuring subjects for scientific purposes?"

The fellow smiled and shook his head, but would not answer.

His conduct was such, however, as to convince the Secret Service man that he had guessed correctly.

"If this is the truth," he said, by way of drawing the mute out, "the case is altered. If these subjects are collected for the use of medical students, and you can show that they have not been procured illegally, there will be nothing against you, and you had better tell me the truth."

But the venture was a failure. The mute only shook his head, shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

Thad was exasperated, and decided to bring matters to a crisis at once.

"Come," he said, on his fingers, of course, "I will waste no more time on you. A few days in prison will doubtless change your resolution about keeping this matter secret!"

But the mute showed no appearance of fear, still smiled, and answered:

"You have no right to arrest me. I have done nothing, and besides you have no warrant."

"I do not need a warrant," retorted Burr. "I have found you in possession of this thing, and I shall take the risk of putting you under arrest."

"Very well," said the mute, calmly. "I will go with you, but you will regret your action."

With that he stepped into the back room and got his hat, and then returning, signified his readiness to accompany the detective to the station.

Burr was rather sorry that he had gone so far with the matter, as in reality he had no right to arrest the man, but it was too late to back down now, and started for the door.

The mute followed, and when Thad waited for him to unlock the door, stepped forward promptly and putting the key in the lock, turned it and threw open the door. As he did so, Burr heard footsteps on the stairs, and from the sound it was evident that there were several persons ascending.

They had only reached the second flight, judging from the sound, and the hall was almost in total darkness, but to his surprise, the mute turned upon him with a scared face and hurriedly spelled out the words:

"It is the other six! You had better save yourself while there is time!"

The detective realized the wisdom of the warning, and answered:

"Where shall I go?"

"Slip into the hall and elude them, if you can. If not, conceal yourself in the closet again. I will see that you make your escape afterwards."

This generosity after what he had threatened to do to the mute was more than Thad could understand, and he was loth to believe in its sincerity, but when he came to look at the poor fellow's face again, he was satisfied that he was incapable of deceit, and as he had now waited too long to permit of his escape past the men who were coming up, he decided upon the other course, and hastened to get back into the closet. After all, he argued, this would be the better plan, as he would in all probability, have an opportunity of learning something of the nature of this strange brotherhood.

He had not been in any too much haste,

for hardly had the door closed upon him, when the sullen tramp of the men was heard in the room.

Burr heard them close and lock the door, and then all became quiet for some moments, but finally they began to walk about the floor again, and all this time there was not the sound of a single voice.

This fact convinced the detective that the Silent Seven, or at least six of them, had returned without the two young men or the Jew, and whatever conversation might be going on was in the deaf and dumb alphabet.

While he was still wondering what they were doing, one of the strange brotherhood was heard approaching the closet.

Thad squeezed himself as closely into one corner as possible, and the next instant the door was thrown open.

The silent man took no notice of him, however, and a moment later, to his horror, four of the others brought something wrapped in a sheet and stood it beside the detective, and then the mute who had opened the door, as quickly closed it again.

It required no great stretch of imagination on the detective's part to guess that the object just thrust in beside him was another subject, as the mute had called the other one, and a cold chill ran over him as he realized the fact that he was stuck in a closet with two lifeless corpses!

As soon as the silent crew had closed the door of the closet they all withdrew into the kitchen and Burr was left alone with his thoughts and the dead men.

There soon came the sound of the clicking of glasses, and Thad concluded that it was a good time for him to make his escape before they should return. He was about to push open the door, when he was again arrested by the entrance of a single one of the men.

He listened, and heard the person first approach the door and unlock it and then make straight for the closet. He had guessed the truth before the fellow reached him, and was not surprised, therefore, when the closet door was opened and the same man whom he was about to arrest stood before him.

The mute spoke in his silent language:

"They are all engaged with the wine. Now is your chance. Come. I will help you to escape."

Thad lost no time in obeying the order, and stole softly to the door, which the mute opened for him and he stepped out into the hall.

To his astonishment the mute followed him into the hall, and although it was so dark that only the outline of the man could be discerned, made out to say:

"Farewell. You are a detective, but I have saved your life. Do not think hard of me, for you will some time learn that I am not as bad as you now imagine."

So saying, he grasped the detective's hand, shook it and disappeared through the door, which he quickly locked after him.

Burr was more than astonished at this unexpected kindness, and wondered how the fellow had come to act in this way in return for his own severity. And he still pondered the subject as he made his way down stairs.

As soon as he reached the street, Burr procured the first cab he could find and had himself driven to Police Headquarters. Here he reported his discovery, and then went home.

It was long after midnight when he reached home, but the strange occurrences of the evening had perturbed his mind to such an extent that he was unable to sleep very much that night.

Early the following forenoon he made another call upon the superintendent, and relating the experiences of the night before, asked:

"What was the result of the captain's raid last night, chief?"

"Just what I prophesied it would be," replied Byrnes. "The boys called at the number you told me about and went all through the building, but only to find that there was not a suspicious character on the premises. This is the usual result of these raids. The sharpers always manage to slip away before the police arrive."

"In this case, however, they did nothing of the kind," rejoined Burr in a disgusted voice, "and in my opinion if the police had done their duty they would have made a haul."

"What do you mean, Thad?"

"I mean that while the police were still in the building the men I spoke to you about came out."

"You saw them?"

"I did. Nor is that all. On the fourth floor, as I told you, the rascals did a job last night that needs looking into very seriously."

"What was that?"

"I may be mistaken, but I believe they murdered the old farmer of whom I spoke, and if they did, his remains were still in the room and only covered with a mantle or something of the kind when the police were in the building."

"How do you know this, Thad?"

"I followed the men whom I saw coming out of the building, saw them call at a house on West Fifteenth street, and saw a man come out with them—a Jew, whom I believe to be your Sheeny Sam. The three men drove to a place on Avenue D, near Fourteenth, and the Jew went up into a tenement-house there. The occupants of this tenement are deaf mutes, seven in number, and they call themselves the Silent Seven. I effected an entrance to the flat by way of the fire-escape, after the party had gone, and I found a corpse in a closet. While concealing myself in this same closet some time after, six of the seven mutes came in with another body and placed in the closet beside me."

"This was comfortable company," laughed Byrnes. "But seriously, this is a bad piece of business, Thad. Have you any reason to believe that the corpse brought in last was that of the old farmer you saw in company with the two young men?"

"I have every reason to believe it, sir. I overheard a conversation between the Jew and the young men in which they discussed this affair, and finally the Jew remarked that they would notify the Silent Seven and have them take care of the corpse. They did not call it that, but it was easily understood what they referred to when they spoke of 'it,' and expressed a fear that the police would discover it."

"You did not recognize the body as that of the farmer, then?"

"No, that was impossible, as they had it wrapped in a sheet. Besides, it was very dark in the room."

"Well," pursued the superintendent, after a little reflection, "I will look into this at once, and I shall also haul Captain Nolan over the coals for his failure to do anything last night."

CHAPTER IV.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS.

AN hour after Burr left the Police Headquarters the superintendent sent out two details of police, one to the place on Grand street, with special instructions to make a thorough search of the building and arrest anybody of a suspicious character found on the premises, and the other to the flat on Avenue D, with similar instructions. And both details returned a few hours later with the information that no suspicious characters were to be found.

At the Avenue D place no bodies were found, nor any living beings except a deaf and dumb girl, who in addition appeared to be only half-witted.

This was a surprise to the detective, who supposed that there were no women there. The police had arrested the girl, but after an examination before a police court, she was released, and that ended the affair.

During the day Thad also paid a visit to each place, and was no more successful than the police. No one was to be found.

Thus matters went on for a week, without any new developments, and both Burr and the superintendent began to think that the game had flown the city, and for the first time in Thad's life he was on the point of abandoning the case.

This was the advice of the chief, who had long since given it up as hopeless, and Burr had only continued through his aversion to failure when he had at once started upon a case. And then, when it was least expected, a new phase of the case developed.

He had called at the house on Fifteenth

street in the hope of seeing the Jew for the twentieth time, only to be told that he was out and that they knew nothing of his whereabouts, and had just returned home in an almost despondent state of mind, and found a man waiting to see him.

The stranger was a Western man, judging from his appearance, a man of perhaps thirty, plain, blunt and evidently a countryman.

"I was at Police Headquarters," he explained, as soon as Burr entered the room where he was, "and the chief sent me to you, as he said you were working on the case."

Thad was only working on one case, so it was not hard for him to guess what one the countryman meant.

"You refer, I presume, to the disappearance of the man from Missouri?" said the detective.

"Yes, Harrison W. Higgins," rejoined the other. "He was my father. He came on here to the city over a week ago, on business, and we have heard nothing of him since, and I concluded to come on and look into the matter. I called at Police Headquarters first, and as soon as I mentioned the name, the chief told me that you were on the case, so I came to you."

"Did the chief tell you what had become of your father?" inquired Burr.

"He said that from the appearances of things he had been enticed into some place and murdered."

"That he has been murdered, there seems little doubt, but I cannot say about the enticing. From what I can learn, he went of his own free will."

"His own free will?" cried the stranger in consternation. "Impossible, sir!"

"No, there is nothing impossible in this world, especially with sharps. But before we discuss the point, let me ask you what your father's business in the city was."

"That I cannot tell—not exactly. It was in regard to making an investment of some kind, but father was always close about his business affairs, and nobody, with rare exceptions, ever knew anything about them."

"Well, don't be shocked, then, when I tell what your father's business was."

The stranger opened his eyes very wide and a look of apprehension clouded his face, but he merely said:

"Well?"

"Your father came to New York in response to a letter from a sharper, who claimed to have a lot of stolen gold dust which he was willing to dispose of at one-fourth its value, or something of the kind. Your father knew before he left home that he was dealing with a swindler, and that in purchasing the goods, which the swindler plainly told him were obtained in a questionable manner, he put himself in the same category as the swindler himself. He came on here expecting to obtain something for nothing, or next to nothing, and—"

"Stop, sir!" cried the young man, jumping to his feet, his face suffused with rage. "Whatever your position may be, or whatever connection you may have with this case, you shall not speak of my father in that manner. I know that he was called close, and drove a hard bargain sometimes, but nobody ever dared to speak of or even hint at his dishonesty. I won't hear it!"

"Then you do not want to hear the truth?" observed Thad, coolly.

"I do want to hear the truth, but this, I am satisfied, is not the truth."

"Suppose I convince you to the contrary?"

"That is impossible, for I know better. Besides, what has this to do with the case?"

"Everything. It is necessary to put you right before we start. Look at that," pursued Burr, handing him the letter he had picked up in the gutter. "Read that, and then we will talk."

The countryman took the letter with nervous fingers, and, sinking into his chair again, read the letter.

His brow clouded as he proceeded, and when he had come to the end, he exclaimed:

"Well, I'll be darned! I wouldn't have believed it! Where did you get this?"

Thad related the incident which led to the finding of the letter, and concluded by saying:

"So you see that what I said was true,

and that overthrows the theory of his having been enticed into this affair."

"So it would seem," sighed the other, "but I never would have believed it. Then you think that he was taken into some place, or went in of his own accord, and was murdered for his money?"

"That is my theory. Had your father a large sum of money on him when he left home, that you know of?"

"He must have had. He had over ten thousand dollars in the bank, a short time ago, and that we found had been drawn out, and must have had that with him, and how much more I cannot tell."

"What was your father's disposition?"

"How do you mean?"

"In case of a deal, for instance. If he thought he was being swindled, would he be apt to protest with a good deal of vehemence?"

"Yes, he would fight as long as life remained."

"That completes the circuit of my hypothesis. He went into the place with these sharpers, knowing in advance that they were rascals, and had his eyes wide open. They showed him a sample of the gold-dust, and wanted him to put up his good money, which he refused to do until he had examined what he was about to purchase. Then came a dispute. He would not yield unless they showed him the stuff he was to buy, and they insisted upon his taking it along without opening the bag until he should get outside of the city, or at least outside of their place, and finally, finding that they could do nothing with him, and still determined to have the money which they knew him to have on his person, put him out of the way in order to obtain it."

"Your theory seems to be a plausible one, sir. What progress have you made in the case?"

"Very little, I am ashamed to say; but principally on account of stupidity of the police captain sent by the chief to arrest the men as soon as I suspected foul play."

"Do you expect to go on with the case?"

"That depends somewhat upon the circumstances. The chief has about abandoned hope of making anything out of it, and I do not feel like going on without some hope of reward."

"If that is all," interposed the countryman, "I will see that you are well rewarded, if you bring the culprits to justice, or even discover what they have done with the remains of my father. As a retainer," he went on, taking out a five hundred dollar bank note and handing it to Burr, "that, I think, ought to carry you along for awhile. When you think you ought to have more, you shall have it. Only promise me that you will never abandon the case until you have brought the culprits to justice, or, at the very least, discovered my father's remains."

"I shall do my best, sir," pledged the detective, "and I have never failed in the a case yet. However, it may be as easy to catch the culprits as to find the body."

"How so?"

"From what I have discovered so far I infer that these fellows are connected with a set of body-snatchers whose business it is to supply subjects for medical students, and if they have disposed of the body, it will be next to impossible to recover it, as it will be mangled beyond recognition by this time."

The countryman groaned and his eyes filled with tears.

"This is awful!" he sighed. "I do not mind the loss of the money so much, for father left plenty of property, but the thought of him being murdered in this way, and then mutilated so that we cannot recognize him even if we should find him!"

"However, it may not be as bad as that," observed the detective, encouragingly. "The police have been pretty hot on their track and it may be that they have not had time to dispose of the body. I will see what can be done to night. Will you remain in the city for some time?"

"A few days, I think, and I can stay longer if necessary."

"I would like, if possible, to have you remain until I find the body, so that you can identify it."

"Very well, I will remain as long as you say."

As soon as the countryman took his leave Thad disguised himself as a tough, and call-

ed once more at Police Headquarters. As it was still early, he was fortunate enough to find the chief still in his office.

Burr had some difficulty in gaining access to him, as no one knew him in his outlandish make-up, but he finally did so, and the chief roared with laughter when he was told of the circumstance.

"Well, you are the greatest artist in the line of making up of them all," declared Byrnes. "I don't think your mother would know you in that disguise."

"I am quite sure she wouldn't. By the way, chief, I had a visitor this afternoon."

"Yes, I sent him to you. Well, what had he to say?"

"He is the old fellow's son, you know?"

"So he told me. What had he to offer?"

"Well, for one thing, this," rejoined the detective, producing the bank-note.

"Ah, then he wants you to go on with the case?"

"Yes, he wants me to prosecute it as long as there is the least show of success."

"And he is willing to pay for it?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead, then. You want nothing better than that."

"So I shall, but what I called upon you this afternoon for was to ask for a little assistance."

"You shall have it, if it is within my power. What is it, Thad?"

"I want a detail of say four good men to go with me."

"Is that all?"

"That is all for the present."

"You may as well have a dozen if you want them."

"I don't want them. Four will serve my purpose better than a dozen."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to pay another visit to the Avenue D place and see if I cannot find that body."

"That is hardly likely, Thad. You know Captain Connors was there with a squad and made a thorough search. They have evidently removed the bodies before now."

"That may be, but I shall not be satisfied till I search the place myself."

"Very well. You would always have your own way. The men are at your disposal."

"Can I have them at once?"

"Certainly. Have you any choice?"

"No, so long as they are good and trusty."

"I'll see that you have the best on the force."

A few minutes later Burr left the station with four of the chief's crack men, who, at his suggestion, were dressed in citizen's clothes.

For the purpose of further carrying out his plans, he secured a closed carriage, and he and the men were driven to the corner of the street nearest the tenement on Avenue D.

"Now," said he, as soon as the carriage stopped, "I will go on in advance. You come on a little later, but scatter along as though you were not of the same body, and in about ten minutes go to the top floor of the number I told you, and wait in the hall until I call upon you. In the mean time, of course, if you hear anything of an alarming nature inside, you have the liberty of breaking the door and coming to my rescue, but otherwise remain as quiet as possible."

Having delivered these instructions the detective alighted and made his way to the tenement.

It had already grown dark by this time, and everything was very quiet about the place.

The few toughs he met about the doorway and hall were so nearly what he appeared to be that no notice was taken of him as he entered, and he mounted the stairs.

It was quiet as usual on the top floor, only this time there was not even a light in the flat, which led him to believe that nobody was at home.

This would be all the better for him, as he could do his work without molestation.

Going to the window at the rear end of the hall, Thad removed the sash and performed the same operation that he had done before of jumping from the ledge to the

balcony, and was soon ready to tamper with the window.

This time, however, he found the window nailed up hard and fast, and it looked as if his project was at an end. But he happened to possess a large dirk-knife which was very strong in the blade, and with this he succeeded in ripping out a couple of the lights, which left a hole sufficiently large for him to crawl through.

The noise occasioned by this piece of work would have aroused the inmates, had they been in and anything but deaf mutes, but considering the latter fact, he had no fear on that score, and reflected that their affliction was rather convenient on this occasion.

But from the extreme stillness which prevailed in the place, he concluded that there was nobody at home anyway, and made bold to push on to the front room without delay.

The place was in darkness, and it was evident that nobody was there. He next visited the closet, opened the door and groped inside with his hand.

The closet was empty.

Still he was not satisfied, and he felt about in the darkness for the lamp he had seen on the former occasion, and not finding it in the front room, returned to the kitchen. Here he found it on the dining-table, and lighted it. He then returned with the light to the front room, and began his search for the body of the murdered countryman.

It was at once apparent that it was not in the closet, so he searched elsewhere. Every possible place where a body could be concealed was searched, but to no purpose. He was about to abandon the hunt, when his attention was attracted by what appeared to be a false panel in the back of the closet.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHADOW OF A CLUE.

A THRILL of hope passed through the detective at sight of what appeared to be a secret panel.

If it should prove to be such, there was no doubt it was there for some vicious purpose, and he determined to find what there was in the theory.

Putting the lamp down on a table which stood in the middle, he set to work examining the back of the closet.

Pounding on the boards forming the back proved them to be hollow, which raised his hopes still higher.

But the trouble was to discover the way of opening the device.

There was no apparent key-hole, and he knew that there must be some other fastening.

He again had recourse to his dirk-knife, which he forced under the edge of the panel and pried with all his strength, but the contrivance was stubborn and the wood of the hardest kind, and his efforts were vain.

Again he looked about for the secret of the fastening, but there was not so much as a tack in the whole back. The secret spring, or whatever the arrangement was, must be somewhere else about the closet, and he looked outside.

On the end of the closet were a number of brass-headed nails, but he could not see what connection they could have with the back. However, in an emergency like this a man will test the most unlikely things and so it was with Thad. He began with the first nail and pressed each one in turn, until every one had been tried, but it was no use. The secret panel, if such it was, still continued unmoved.

He then started to walk around to the other end of the closet, and in doing so accidentally pushed one of the doors to, when he noticed a peculiar movement of the portion of the back which he had imagined a secret panel. Thad clutched the edge of the panel and shoved with some force, when to his astonishment and delight it moved aside with perfect ease, disclosing a dark recess behind it.

It was impossible to tell how far the recess extended, and for aught he knew the whole band of the Silent Seven might have been concealed within it.

Thad therefore realized the importance of moving with extreme caution.

Stepping inside the closet, he peered into the dark opening and listened, but he could neither see nor hear anything.

Returning to the room, he took out his dark lantern and lighted it, and again going to the back of the closet, threw the glare of the lantern into the opening.

Then he saw that instead of a pit or recess, as he had imagined, it was simply a secret opening from this to another room. A door had been cut through a partition and the closet stood against the wall in such a way as to cover the aperture, and the sliding panel served to close the secret passage. From the direction of the passage it must open into a separate flat, as the room which he was then in extended the full width of that particular flat.

Shutting off his light, he again stepped into the passage and listened. All was still as the grave. He hesitated for an instant, and considered the possible consequences of plunging boldly into such a place without knowing where he was going or who he was liable to encounter, and then shutting his eyes to all apprehension, stepped through the passage.

He appeared to have come into a room, but it was so dark that he could only surmise the fact, and after listening again for some sound of life, he boldly shot the slide of his lantern and threw the glare about the place.

As he had surmised, he was in a room, and it was similar in every respect to the one he had just left, except that instead of being furnished in the same way, the room was full of lumber of various kinds. Among other plunder, he could not but notice the number of boxes of a similar size and shape. They were about seven or eight feet long and two to two and a half feet high. They were constructed of rough boards, and had the exact appearance of the outside box of a burial casket.

These, he thought, are what they carry off their "subjects" in, and he had no doubt that he would find the body of old man Higgins in one of them.

Some of the boxes were standing on end about the walls and others were piled up on top of each other.

He tried the lid of one of the latter, and finding that it was not fastened on, removed it and peeped in. The box was empty, as were several others which he subsequently opened in the same way. Then he came to one that was nailed. Looking about, he found a heavy coal-chisel, and a mallet, and with these instruments he soon had the lid removed.

Flashing his light inside the box, he was disappointed at finding nothing but rock-salt.

However, he thought, this was approaching the thing. Here were the coffins and here was the material for preserving the bodies, and he straightway opened another box. But the contents were the same as the last one's.

Then followed a lot of empty ones, and he had about made up his mind that they would all turn out the same way, when it occurred to him that those standing on end might be different.

Moving one or two of them, they appeared to be empty, but he finally came to one which was heavy enough to indicate that it was full of something.

"This seems to be the thing," he mused.

And at once set to work prying the lid off. This was soon accomplished, and when the last nail was drawn something tilted forward, forcing the lid out and before the detective could prevent it, the whole mass came to the floor with a crash.

Then he saw what the box had been filled with. The object on the floor was undoubtedly a body, but was completely swathed in a sheet so that he could only discern the outlines.

Thad stooped over to remove the cloth in order to examine the body, but just as he did so, he was surprised at hearing the shuffling sound of approaching footsteps, and the next instant fully half a dozen figures rushed into the room from some rear apartment.

Their appearance was so sudden and unexpected that he had no time to prepare before they were upon him.

A glance was sufficient to show him that

they were the Silent Seven, and he realized that he was in for it.

But Thad did not lose his presence of mind.

He remembered that there were four good and reliable allies in the hall, and if he could only reach the other room, he would be all right.

But the problem was how to get there. Part of the mutes had, apparently intentionally, thrown themselves between him and the passage through the wall, and he could only reach it by removing them in some way.

The mutes had brought no light with them, and with the exception of the glare of the dark-lantern which the detective held, the place was in gloom.

He was not long in thinking of this, and of considering that his enemies would beat a disadvantage if the light were shut off, and the next instant he closed the slide.

This caused a great commotion among the silent men, as he could tell by the sound of their shuffling about.

Meanwhile he had sprung into a corner and taken advantage of their panic to draw his revolver, and then quicker than thought he raised the weapon above his head and fired twice in quick succession. This he expected would have the effect of striking them with terror, but he had miscalculated. Instead of doing so, it only increased their rage, and the next instant he found himself surrounded by a furious mob, making the room echo with the strange noises peculiar to a mute, and brandishing their fists in his face.

It was impossible to use his revolver now, for the men were too close upon him, and before he could make a move in that direction anyway, they had hustled him into a corner, knocked the pistol from his hands, and began to rain blows upon his head in a most murderous manner.

Thad fought with the desperation of death, but it was of little avail with seven against him.

There was one thing in his favor. Up to that moment no weapons had been employed by his adversaries, and so long as they used only their fists, he did not fear the consequences very much. Nevertheless, he soon found his strength failing him under the continued shower of blows, and realized that he could not much longer hold out.

"Why do not those stupid police break the door and come to my rescue?" he mused in his desperate situation. "They must have heard the shots, and ought to know by that I am in trouble."

They did not come, however, and still the detective fought on against the desperate odds.

But it could not last long.

His strength was momentarily waning.

Finally, in a fit of desperation, he thought of his dirk, and managing to free one of his hands, he drew it.

In another instant he would have carved his way to liberty, but at that very juncture, as if by intuition, one of his enemies grasped him by the throat while two more clutched his wrists, and then with the united strength of the other four, he was thrown to the floor.

Here he was held with a vise-like grip by four or five of the mute brotherhood, while some of the others brought ropes, and he was soon securely bound, hand and foot.

It was a strange event all round. The whole performance had been in total darkness, and with the exception of the grunting sound of the mutes and the shuffling of feet, it had been done amid silence of the most profound nature, for knowing the folly of trying to make the mutes understand, Thad had uttered no word since they came upon him.

As soon as they had him securely bound, they all withdrew from the room for some inexplicable cause, and almost at the same moment Burr heard a series of thumps which sounded like some one pounding on the door somewhere in the distance, and this was presently followed by a crash, as if a door had been broken in.

A moment later he heard voices not far off, and then he realized that the police had broken down the door of the other apartment and were searching for him.

With difficulty he turned his face toward the wall where the opening through which

he had made his entry was, and, dark as it was, he could see from the dim light coming in from the street that the panel had been closed.

The detective's heart sunk.

He realized now that the police would never find him, as they would not suspect the existence of the secret panel, and unless he could make them hear, his hope of rescue might as well be abandoned.

He could still hear the men talking and also the sound of their feet as they moved about in the next room, and in his desperation, he finally called out at the top of his voice:

"Help! Murder! Police!"

All became quiet in the next room, and he knew the police had heard him.

They began moving about again, and he knew they were searching for a door.

"Through the back of the closet!" called the detective.

Again silence in the next room.

The police had heard him, but could not understand what he meant, and soon began moving about again.

"Through the back of the closet!" Thad repeated. "Break the panel in the back of the closet."

A mumbling of voices greeted him as before, but he could make out nothing that was said, and was aware that the police knew no more of what he had said.

Once more he called with all the power of his lungs:

"For God's sake, break through the back of the closet! Police! Murder! Help!"

But it had no other effect than to cause the men to pause and listen, apparently. And then, to put an end to all hope, or whatever little he had had, the mute brotherhood returned to the room.

Whether they had heard him, or rather understood by some mysterious effect of concussion, as mutes are able to do, he could not tell, but certainly they were determined that he should have no chance of calling again, for they put a gag in his mouth, after which he was raised and carried into another place, the nature of which he could not guess, only it appeared to be a trifle darker if possible than the room he had just left.

Not satisfied with having him bound so that he could not move and gagged so that it was impossible for him to utter a word, they were heard to lock and bolt a door, which Thad realized was very near his head.

He had been thrown prone upon the hard floor and it was impossible in his bound condition to resume even a sitting posture, and his position was not only hopeless but painful in the extreme.

As soon as the mutes had locked and bolted the door they again withdrew, and after hearing their receding footsteps for a moment or two all became quiet.

"Curse the stupidity of those police!" he muttered to himself. "It is strange that they made no effort to get through the wall to rescue me. But perhaps," he mused, with a sudden inspiration of hope, "they will go next door and try to find me in that way. If I were a police captain and heard a man calling as I did, I would find him if it cost me my life."

And once more he became calm and listened, but not a sound was to be heard.

Hours passed, which appeared much longer to him, and he realized that it must be far into the night, perhaps near morning, and still no one came, and to all appearances the mutes had either retired to rest or left the place.

And then a horrible thought occurred to him.

He knew, from what he had seen, that these fellows were ghouls, and that their business was to procure bodies for medical students or colleges. Would not they be likely to want to dispose of his in the same way? If so, there was little hope of his ever getting out of his present situation alive. They would probably keep him in this place until it suited their convenience, when they would put an end to him in some way.

The thought was horrible! Too horrible to entertain long without the approach of madness, and Thad dismissed it and tried to fix his mind upon some way of escape from his thralldom.

The cords on his wrists were very tight, so tight, in fact, as to almost stop the circulation, and he felt his arms growing numb from the pressure. This caused him to wriggle in order to relieve the strain, and in doing so he found that the bonds were loosened somewhat. This gave rise to new hope, and he continued to wriggle, and from wriggling to straining every muscle against the gripping cords.

Little by little he felt them growing more slack, and finally to his unutterable delight, he found himself able to release one of his hands.

No mortal can conceive the joy realized by this man as he felt his hand slip from the bonds which, a moment ago, he had imagined were to remain there until he had ceased to breathe.

Having released one hand, the rest of the task was simple. The mutes had thought it not worth while to disarm him, and he still possessed a knife. This he lost no time in drawing forth and soon had the remaining cords severed from his limbs, and also the gag removed from his mouth.

Having accomplished this much, he next groped about for some means of escape, but at that instant he heard approaching footsteps.

CHAPTER VI.

TO THE RESCUE.

BURR paused when he heard the footsteps and his heart stood still for the space of several seconds.

Then he remembered that he was still armed, at least with a knife, and drew it ready for use.

As the footsteps drew nearer he noticed that there was but one person, and for a moment he hoped that whoever it was was not coming to him after all. But the hope was short lived, for an instant later he heard a key go into the lock of the door, and a little later the door was thrown open.

Whoever the person was had brought no light, and it was impossible to see what he was like, and something made him hesitate attacking the intruder until he knew more of what his intentions were.

Not a sound came from the new-comer, and Thad knew by that that it was one of the mutes, at the same time he could not believe that he had come for an evil purpose, for if he had he would not have come alone.

While the detective was still ruminating upon who the person might be and what his purpose was, he was astonished and startled at feeling a hand come in and grope forward as if searching for him, and as the hand touched him about the knees, he understood that the person expected to find him lying on the floor still.

Burr now considered it time for him to act.

It appeared evident that the object of the person in groping after him was to stab him or inflict some other deadly punishment, and his salvation lay in acting promptly.

With a quick movement he stooped forward and made a clutch at random, and was lucky enough to catch the person by the back of the neck.

The unknown struggled feebly, but the powerful detective held him as though he had been a child, and this caused him to have a different idea about the new-comer. Certainly the mutes would never have sent one so weak as he to kill the detective, and while this was still in his mind his disengaged hand accidentally fell upon one of the other's arms.

Horrors! It was a woman!

Relaxing his hold upon her, Thad sprang back, and in doing so, struck plump against the wall behind him, and he could not have been more than a yard and a half from the door. Therefore he had been locked in a closet all night.

Forgetting that this mysterious visitor was deaf and dumb, he said:

"What do you want?"

There was no answer, of course, and for several seconds there was a dead silence, during which he could not even hear his visitor breathe, and he had begun to think that she was gone, when he felt the hand come into contact with him again; and this time it took hold of his coat and gave a sharp tug, which seemed to indicate that she wanted him to come out of the closet.

Curious to know what she really wanted, he followed, and she led on, still holding to his coat. Presently she opened a door, when to Thad's surprise, he found himself in the same room where he had discovered the boxes, and what surprised him still more was that there was a light burning.

He took occasion to examine the features of the woman, and there was something strikingly familiar about them.

Where had he seen them?

Then it came to him. She bore a remarkable likeness to the mute who had released him before, and the thought occurred to him that she might be the same.

The police reported having arrested a woman who appeared to be half-witted, and this was undoubtedly she, but there appeared nothing simple about her.

Spelling on his fingers, the detective asked:

"Where have I seen you before?"

"In there," she replied in the same way, pointing in the direction of the flat.

If he had still had any doubt about her being the person who had liberated him before, the shrug and grin which accompanied this answer would have convinced him.

"You are the same one that opened the door for me some time ago, then?" he said.

"Opened the door for you?" she asked, and accompanied the question with a wondering stare.

"Yes. Don't you remember?"

She shook her head.

Just then Burr cast a hasty glance about the room and his eyes fell upon a mirror that reflected his face.

He was constrained to laugh at the uncouth reflection.

He had forgotten until that moment that he was made up as a ruffian, and he did not wonder that the woman did not recognize him, if, indeed, she was the same.

He realized therefore that he would have to come at her in a different way, and he asked:

"Were you not dressed as a man the other night?"

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled, but made no reply. And then quickly followed it by spelling:

"You had better go while you have a chance."

"Yes, right away," he replied.

And then took occasion to look about the room again.

The first thing that impressed him was the absence of the body which had tumbled out of the box when he unfastened the lid.

She noticed his surprise, and throwing up her hands and shrugging her shoulders very much, indicated by gestures that the object in question had been taken a long way off.

He did not believe this, thinking that this was simply a ruse to throw him off his guard.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"I do not know," she replied. "It was taken away last night. They took it a long way off. I do not know where."

"Who took it, the Silent Seven?" he inquired.

"No, the police," she replied.

He felt sure now that she was not telling the truth, and said:

"No, not the police. The police have not been here."

"But they have," she insisted. "They came in shortly after you were locked up yonder and finding the body, took it away with them."

"Did they arrest any of the Seven?"

"No, they were not to be found," she answered with a significant grin.

"Are they here now?"

"You will know, if you don't hurry and get away."

"I will soon go."

"Go now. Five minutes may be too long to stay."

"Very well, I will go in one minute. But first tell me, which way did the police come in?"

"I shall not tell you."

"Why?"

"Because if I do, you will ask more questions, and that will detain you too long."

"Very well. I will go now. Which way shall I go?"

"This way," she replied, opening the panel and pointing to the passage.

"Is the other door open?" he asked.

"Yes."

He was about to obey her orders, when he chanced to glance at the floor and saw his lantern where he had dropped it during his struggle with the mutes.

Stooping, he picked it up and put it into his pocket.

The woman glanced at him and smiled significantly.

He then stepped through the passage into the other room, which was very dark, and he hesitated before proceeding.

Noticing his hesitation, she hastily sprung through the passage, and taking his hand, started to lead him to the door, when his foot struck against something on the floor.

He stopped, and the woman became frantic in her endeavors to hurry him out of the place.

This aroused his suspicions that the object was something which she did not desire him to see, and he was the more determined that he would see it.

She struggled with him with all her strength and uttered that peculiar noise hitherto alluded to, but it was no use. He was set upon seeing that the object was, and whipped out his lantern and shot the slide.

As luck would have it, the light was still burning, and he flashed it upon the floor.

As he had already guessed, it was the identical body which had fallen out of the box when he pried off the lid, and was still wrapped in the sheet.

He attempted to pull away the cloth, but the woman sprung at him with the vehemence of a tigress and tried to drag him back.

Then ensued a lively scuffle.

The woman seemed to have been suddenly endowed with superhuman strength, and in spite of Thad's great power, to which was added a determination that would not brook defeat, she succeeded in forcing him almost to the door, which, to his surprise, he saw was intact. Again he used his utmost to break away from her without inflicting some injury upon her which he did not desire to do, but she clung to him with the strength born of desperation. His gigantic strength prevailed at last, however, and he succeeded in throwing her off and once more getting back to the body.

But she was still not satisfied, and flew at him again. He was on his guard this time, though, and caught her before she had time to get hold of him, and hurled her reeling across the floor.

Her face was a picture of fury now, as she stood glaring at him for a second or two, and then she suddenly appeared to change her mind, for, instead of coming at him again, she turned toward the passage, with the evident intention of darting through, but Thad guessed her motive in time and, grasping her, thrust her back.

"Oh, no you don't!" he muttered. "You'd like to get back there and bring the rest of the gang upon me, wouldn't you? I guess not just yet!"

Although the woman had heard nothing of this, she appeared to understand him thoroughly, for her eyes flashed defiantly, as she made another dash for the passage. But he was too quick for her, and again hurled her back.

And then it occurred to him that he was losing time by this kind of work, that she would continue to strive to get into the other room and warn her friends of the presence and purpose of the detective, and resolved upon different tactics.

She stood a little way off glaring at him and watching her chance to break for the passage which he was guarding.

Having resolved upon a plan of operation, he made a sudden spring to catch her, but she was quick enough to elude him, and doubtless fearing that he meant something desperate, fled precipitately to the back room.

This was what he could have wished, of all things.

Believing that there was no way of getting from the kitchen of this flat into the other one, he closed the door communicating with the first bedroom, locked it and removed the key. To make her captivity doubly secure, he also locked the next door.

This rendered him free to act as he chose

regarding the body which he desired to examine, and he at once returned to his task again.

Rolling the body over a number of times in order to remove the cloth he finally succeeded in doing so, which left the corpse on its face.

He then turned it over, and was startled rather than surprised to find that it was the remains of the old farmer!

"Ah!" he exclaimed aloud. "So much of my task performed, at all events. The next thing is to get it out of here."

After a few moments' reflection, he hit upon a plan of operation.

His first move was to return through the passage to the other room and procure the mallet he had used earlier in the evening and a few nails which he had drawn out of the boxes, and then went back to the apartment where he had found the body.

Closing the panel in the back of the closet, he nailed it securely in its place.

"There, that will prevent the possibility of a surprise from my mute gentlemen, and now I'll proceed to procure help to remove this 'subject,' as those fellows call it."

Shutting off his light, he approached the door, which he found locked. But that fact did not stop him for any great length of time. One or two good blows from the mallet demolished the lock and the door flew open.

"That will prevent trouble on my return," he mused, "in the event of some of those fellows succeeding in getting in and trying to lock it again."

He then proceeded to the street, and, after walking a couple of blocks, found a policeman.

"Officer," he said, "I want you to go with me and help me to remove a corpse. We'll have to—"

But the look the policeman gave him caused him to pause.

"Phwat's that, ye old bum?" growled the cop. "Th' besht thing yez kin do is to take a walk, an' thot moighty lively, or Oi'll run yez in!"

Thad saw the mistake he had made.

In his agitation he had forgotten his make-up, and of course the officer had taken him for what he appeared.

The detective laughed outright when he thought of the blunder, and soon rectified it by first throwing back his coat and exhibiting his badge, and then saying softly:

"I beg your pardon, officer. I had forgotten my disguise. You've probably heard of Thad Burr, the detective," he went on, holding a card up before the cop's eyes.

"Oh, ah!" exclaimed the policeman with an expression of astonishment. "Oi beg your pardon, Mr. Burr. Oi have heard of vez often, sor, an' wance helped yez on a case up this way, an' Oi remimber now phwat a faculty yez hev fer disguisin' yerself so that no wan would know yez from Adam. Phwat kin Oi do fer yez, Mr. Burr?"

Burr related a portion of his experience in as brief a manner as possible, and told him of his ghastly find and the importance there was in getting the body out of the house before the people discovered what they were about.

"We'll have to get some help," he said in conclusion. "I suppose we can pick up somebody in some of these saloons who will be willing to earn a quarter or so?"

"Sure," rejoined the policeman. "Yez'll have no trouble about thot, sor."

They walked back to the corner together, and Thad said:

"You had better go in, officer, and see if you can pick up some one in the saloon there. They would have the same opinion of me that you had if I should go in. Meanwhile I'll keep a lookout for a hack."

The officer went inside and he had been gone but a second when a hack came rumbling along, which Thad saw was empty. He hailed it and although the hackman did not like his looks, he finally pulled up and asked the tramp, as he supposed he was, what he wanted.

The detective explained that he wanted to take a body to the Police Headquarters, and the cabby growled:

"Got any mun, Rags?"

At that moment the policeman appeared, and, thinking that Thad was having trouble

in securing the hack, informed the driver that it was all right, and he appeared to be better satisfied.

Meanwhile the policeman had secured the services of a couple of burly fellows to assist in carrying down the corpse.

CHAPTER VII.

A TELLING POINT.

WHEN Burr got back up-stairs with his assistants, he was gratified to find that there had been no change in affairs during his absence.

The door still stood open as he had left it, and the other one leading to the kitchen was still locked, so that the woman was in all likelihood still in there, and the body lay where he had left it.

To lift the corpse and convey it to the street and place it in the hack, was the work of but a few minutes, but Thad did not feel that his work was quite done yet.

The woman was still locked in the back room.

He could not forget that she had twice released him, probably in each case saving his life, and he felt a twinge of conscience to think he had been compelled to act toward her as he had, and he could do no less now, as a partial compensation, than release her from the kitchen so that she might go to her bed if she so desired.

Returning up-stairs, he unlocked the two doors and looked into the kitchen. The room was so dark that he could see nothing, so he took out his lantern and shot the slide.

There the woman sat with her head on the dining-table, fast asleep.

"Well, let her rest," he mused to himself. "If I disturb her, there is sure to be a row, so I will just leave her alone to her repose, and I will go to mine."

With that he went out of the building, and a few minutes later was on his way downtown.

The hack with the ghastly load was driven to Police Headquarters, and while awaiting the arrival of the coroner, Thad made an examination of the body on his own account.

Although the man had been dead upward of a week the body was in good condition, which showed that it had been well taken care of.

To his surprise there were no marks of violence to be seen at first glance, and he began to think that the man had come to his death by some species of poison. But the absence of any discoloration of the skin upset this theory, unless, indeed, the poison was of a character he was unacquainted with.

After examining the face, chest and stomach for marks of violence and finding none, he turned the man on his face.

The moment he did so, and removed the clothing, he was astonished at what he saw.

All down the spine, or rather close beside it, at regular intervals of about two inches, and for a distance of about a foot, were a series of small red spots from which the blood had flowed very slightly, looking as though they had been pricked with very fine needles. When he came to examine the marks more closely he saw that they had been probed to considerable depth, deep enough, apparently, to have caused death.

It was long after daylight when he arrived at the station, and as the coroner had been induced to come earlier than was his wont, he arrived while the detective was still looking at the strange marks on the body.

The coroner was an old acquaintance of Thad's, and after shaking hands with the detective (who, by the way, had removed his disguise since his arrival) he asked:

"What have we here, Mr. Burr?"

"A very strange case, it strikes me," replied Thad.

As he spoke the detective pointed to the minute red spots along the dead man's spine.

"What do you think of those?" he said.

The coroner, who was a physician, examined the spots carefully for some seconds, and finally exclaimed:

"Well, I'll be switched! That beats all. What do you make of it, Mr. Burr?"

"I can make nothing of it, except that the man has been pierced with some sharp instrument or a series of sharp instruments, but whether death resulted from them or not, is for you to determine."

"And I am as much at a loss to know as yourself, although I should say it is hardly probable that it did."

"Then, I should like you to tell me what was the cause of death, Mr. Morgan."

The coroner turned the body on its face and made the same examinations that the detective had.

At the conclusion he shook his head, and then turned the body back again and made a second examination of the spots.

"Well," he muttered at last, "I don't know but you are right after all, Mr. Burr. The man certainly did not come by his death through any violence inflicted in front, and it is equally questionable whether he was poisoned. The skin does not indicate that. But these little interstices are what puzzle me. They appear to be deep enough to have proved fatal, that is to have caused a paralysis of the nervous system, but the question is, what were they made with, and how came any one to think of putting a man to death in that way?"

"That would be hard to answer, unless they thought no one would think of looking there for marks of violence."

"That was probably the motive, but what kind of instruments could they have used? They look like the prod of a cambric needle, only the instrument must have been much longer than any needle."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, don't you see, the man has hardly bled a drop. If the probe had been less than half an inch it would have bled more profusely externally."

Thad was silent for some time, but finally he started up with a fresh inspiration.

"What caused the man's death will, in all probability, remain a secret so far as you are concerned, Mr. Morgan, and it will remain for me to make the discovery."

"What do you mean?" asked the coroner with some asperity.

"I mean that it is my opinion that the mystery of these little wounds is as near a solution now as they ever will be, so far as can be learned from an examination of the body itself. On the other hand, it may transpire that these very wounds, on account of their peculiarity, will lead to the discovery of the mode of murder which the perpetrators of this crime are in the habit of practicing, and consequently to their apprehension. That, and that alone, in my opinion, is the way the mystery will be unraveled if ever it is."

After some reflection the coroner answered:

"You are probably right, Mr. Burr. At least I cannot see at present how any mortal can ever so much as imagine how these wounds were inflicted, and it is about equally as difficult to determine how the deceased came to his death. Has the man any friends in the city?"

"Yes, he has a son here, and I would like the body to be turned over to him as soon as possible."

"That can be done to day some time."

"Thanks. In the mean time I presume you will not object to sending the remains to some undertaker's so that it can be kept in good condition?"

"Certainly not. It can be sent at once. If I wish to see it again I can view it there as well as any place."

Thad was about leaving the station when the captain whom he had had with him the night before came in. He was astonished to see the detective, and exclaimed:

"What became of you last night? I thought you were dead."

"I've no doubt of it, and so I might have been, so far as you were concerned," returned Thad in a tone of disgust. "What became of you, I should like to know?"

"I staid in the hall, as you told me to, until I heard the firing, and then I thought you might be in trouble and broke open the door and went in, but deuced a sign of you could I see."

"You heard me call, didn't you?"

"Yes, but for the life of me I couldn't make out where you were. I thought you might be in the next flat and went over there and knocked and hammered at the door for half an hour, but never a soul could I raise."

Burr laughed.

"I'm not surprised at that," he smiled.

"The people who live there, as well as in the flat into which you broke, are deaf mutes."

"The dickens you say!"

"That is true, and if you had had your eyes open you might have found the way through from one flat to the other without much trouble."

"Without much trouble?"

"That's what I said."

"Why, man, we searched the walls from one end to the other for a door of some kind, but there was none to be found."

"That was because you didn't look in the right place," laughed the detective.

"In the right place? Where would you have a man look unless it is in the wall?"

"Look any place until you find it. That's the principle I went on and found a door."

"And got into trouble in the bargain, eh?"

"Yes, but accomplished my purpose, nevertheless."

"What was that?"

"I recovered this body," rejoined the detective, pointing at the remains, "and what is more, gained a clue to the murder."

"Do you mean to say that you found this stiff in that ranch?"

"That is what I did."

"How did you manage to get it out? And how did you manage to get out yourself? I thought from the way you yelled that they were doing you."

Thad related briefly his experience in the place, and concluded by saying:

"There is a chance for a haul there, if the right party goes, but it must be some one that knows enough to find a door."

"Speaking about the door," retorted the officer a trifle angrily, "where did you manage to find one?"

Thad laughed again.

"Didn't you hear me tell you last night to come through the closet?" he added.

"I heard you say something about a closet, but I couldn't make out what you meant."

"You saw a closet there, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And the door was open?"

"I believe so, but what had that to do with a door through the wall?"

"Everything. If you heard me at all, you must have heard me say for you to break through the back of the closet."

"I heard you say that, but how was I to know what you meant by it, I'd like to know?"

"Why, breaking through the back of the closet could mean but one thing, and I imagined anybody could have understood it. In the back of that closet was a secret panel, and that is the way I got through. Of course I didn't expect you to look around and find the secret of opening it, but I thought you might have used your night stick to some advantage and smashed the thing in, especially as I was on the other side and yelling loud enough to arouse those deaf mutes, which ought to have led you to believe I was in trouble."

"I knew you were in trouble, but how the deuce was I to know that the back of the closet formed a door leading into the next flat?"

Burr did not reply to this question, for the superintendent came in just then, and the detective hastened to inform of what had happened and advised him to send a squad to the place and capture the murderous band of mutes.

"What is the use, Thad?" asked the chief despondently. "Twice I have sent men to that place, and they came back empty-handed."

"That is because they don't manage it right. If they will go up both stairways and make a simultaneous charge on both places, I have no doubt they will bag the game."

"Well, I will try it again, Thad, but you had better accompany the detail."

"Very well," replied Burr. "I am pretty well used up, as I haven't been to bed for two nights and went through with a pretty tough deal last night, but I'll try it. I would like to capture those fellows above all things."

Taking time enough to get breakfast, he returned to the Police Headquarters, and half an hour later left there with a squad of twenty men for the rendezvous of the Silent Seven.

He had taken an extra number so that

there could be no excuse for their not being numerically strong enough.

Arriving at the place, he sent ten of the men, under the command of a captain, up the flight of stairs leading to the flat where he had found the boxes, with instructions to guard the halls and allow no one to pass, and with the remaining ten he ascended the other flight.

To his surprise, he found the door still open and everything else just as he had left it.

The panel in the back of the closet was still nailed up as he had left it, and the only person to be found about the place was the woman whom he had left asleep in the kitchen.

She was still there, but was wide awake, and glared at the detective and his men when he came in, but she evidently did not recognize him.

After her kindness to him in twice saving his life, he could not have the heart to arrest her, and left her to reconnoiter in the other flat.

A few blows with the mallet, which he found on the floor where he had thrown it after breaking the lock, demolished the panel and made a passage for him and the policemen to enter the other flat, and they filed through, with Thad at their head.

The place was all quiet, just as he had found it on entering the night before, but he did not take that as a signal of safety.

"Our game is probably in the back room," he observed. "We will go back there, but you want to be prepared for a fight, for they are a wicked set of fellows and will most likely fight to the death before being captured."

With that he led the way into the back room.

As they passed through the two intervening small rooms, Thad noticed that they were nearly empty, with the exception of a lot of lumber similar to that in the front room, and there was not a bed of any description in sight.

This filled him with apprehension, for the next room must be the kitchen, and there was no place where the mutes could have slept.

A few minutes later they arrived in the kitchen, or apartment which would have been set apart for that purpose if the house had been occupied, but in this case there was not a stick of furniture in it, and what was more aggravating, not a living being aside from those who had just entered.

The police captain looked at the detective for an explanation and he in turn looked sold.

"Now what do you think of bagging the game?" laughed the captain.

"Oh, we'll bag it quick enough—when we find it," smiled Thad.

"But we're not likely to find it in this place."

"I guess you are right there, captain. But I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"These rascals probably also occupy the floor below, and make it a point to slip from one flat to the other when they are being hunted. We'll go down there."

And so they did, but to no purpose. A quiet family of the poorer class occupied the flat, but no mutes. Nor did they appear to know anything about the Silent Seven.

"Sold, sure enough," exclaimed Burr.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TELL-TALE BLOTTER.

"WELL, you can probably understand now, Mr. Burr, why the police did not make any arrests on their former visits to this place," observed the captain who accompanied his squad.

"Yes, I can see that these fellows might have given them the slip as they have us, but there was no such excuse last night. The rascals were here and might have been arrested easily if the police had done as I requested them."

"What do you think of leaving a detail here to watch the place, detective?"

"It would be a very good way of keeping these fellows from returning, perhaps. That is all the good it would result in."

"You don't think it would result in any arrests?"

"Certainly not. These fellows are not such fools as to come back as long as they see a squad of policemen guarding the place."

"But suppose the men are in citizen's clothes?"

"That would make no difference. These rascals know every movement made by the police a great deal better than the police know their movements. If the police were as well acquainted with them as they are with the police, they wouldn't do such a thriving business."

After making a complete search of the premises without discovering any clue to the whereabouts of the mutes, the detective and his squad finally withdrew and gave it up as a bad job. Thad was determined, however, to keep a close watch on the place and the movements of the mysterious gang, believing that he would be able to run them down in time.

Having discharged his escort, Burr went home, where he found Higgins awaiting his return.

"Well," exclaimed the countryman, "you must have been having a siege!"

"Rather," replied Thad.

"I've been here and to Police Headquarters half a dozen times, and nobody knew where you were."

"I'm not surprised at that. I scarcely knew myself a good part of the time."

"Anything new?" asked Higgins.

"Yes, a great deal."

"What?"

"Well, for one thing, I have found your father."

"You have?" cried the other enthusiastically. "And—"

"He is dead," interrupted the detective, "as we had supposed."

"Shot?"

"No."

"Not stabbed?"

"No."

"My God!" exclaimed the young man, "did they poison him?"

"No, they didn't even poison him."

Higgins stared blankly at him.

"The fact is," resumed Thad, "that it is a mystery how he came by his death, and may always remain so, but I will do all in my power to clear it up."

He then went on to describe the peculiar wounds found on the dead man's body, and concluded by remarking:

"But after all, this may prove a valuable clue to the identity of the murderers. If any instrument corresponding to the wounds is found we will know that it was the one employed in killing your father, and if it is in the possession of those fellows, we will have a case against them. But I have a proposition to make."

"What is it?"

"You will doubtless return home very soon, now that your father's remains have been found, won't you?"

"Yes, I shall start at once."

"Very well. My proposition is this: As soon as you get back home write, or have some of your friends write, to this S. Einstein, making inquiry about his gold dust, and assuming that you or they have a large amount of money to invest. He will doubtless catch at the bait and answer your letter or that of your friend, as the case may be, and you or he can make an appointment to meet the swindlers wherever they may suggest. In the mean time keep me posted, and when the time comes for the meeting I will disguise as a countryman and meet him."

"Very well, I shall be only too glad to do it, or anything to catch the rascal."

"It won't do to write in your own name, you know. They would suspect something."

"That is true. I will use a fictitious name, and, as I am not a great ways from Springfield and often go there, I can write from that place, which will still further conceal my identity."

"Yes, that will be a good idea, and what will be better still, if you can run across anybody who has received a circular from these fellows, have him write or allow you to use his name, and they will be sure to suspect nothing."

"I will see what I can do."

"When will you start for the West?"

"To-day, if I can get possession of the remains."

"You can. They are at the undertaking establishment of Charles Baccigaluppo, 25 Mulberry street, and will be well taken care of."

"Thanks."

"If you start this afternoon, I ought to hear from you inside of a week," observed Burr. "Meanwhile I will not be idle here."

"Yes, you will hear from me in about a week."

As soon as the young man was gone, the detective disguised himself as a countryman and called at the place on Grand street.

He had no trouble in gaining access to the office, but found nobody there except a young woman typewriter.

The young woman received him with effusive politeness, and asked him what she could do for him.

"Is Mr. Einstein about?" he inquired.

"No, he is not in at present, but I expect him almost any time," she replied. "Was it anything particular?"

"Wal, rather," drawled the pretended countryman. "I heered as how he had a lot o' ginnywine gold-dust thet he wanted tew sell cheap fer cash. Now, I've got a few thousand whut I got frum my farm when I sold eout, an' I wouldn't mind investin' if the stuff's all right."

The girl eyed him suspiciously for a moment, but there was nothing suspicious in the blank, half-idiotic face that she saw, and she appeared to be satisfied that he was all right, for she replied:

"I believe he has a little left, but Mr. Einstein attends to all transactions himself, and he is not here at present. If you will leave your name and address, he will either write to or call upon you."

"Wal, I wanted to go home to-night, but if you think he'd see me this afternoon, I wouldn't mind stayin' over."

"I think it quite likely that he might see you this afternoon. He might see you early enough to allow you to leave to-night, for that matter."

"Wal, thet would do. But whut's the matter with waitin' here fer him?"

"You might do that, but the chances are that you would have to wait a long time, for he may not be in for an hour or two."

"Then I reckon I won't wait. I'll leave my 'dress."

"Write it in this book," said the girl, putting a large register on the counter before him.

Thad took up the pen and wrote:

"Jeremiah Beesly, polkpatch Postoffis, Warrick co., Indiana."

"What is your city address?" asked the girl, glancing at the name and address he had written. "You know he must know where you are stopping if you want him to call upon you."

"Oh, yas, I clean forgot thet," he drawled, and taking up the pen again, added in the line beneath:

"At present stayin to the maddyson House, forth Avynoo."

"That will do," said the girl, handing him a blotter.

Thad blotted his writing slowly, and at the same time continued to talk.

"I hope he'll git thar, er write so's I kin meet him," he went on, "fer I'm mighty anxious to git hold o' some o' thet gold-dust to take eout homs, and make the boys jealous of me. Then, thar's Suky Larkins, she's my gal, ye know—when she see's thet gold-dust, an' I tell her thet I dug it up myself, she'll be jest crazy to hev me, an' them other fellers won't be in it with me."

And so he ran on, and the typewriter never saw that blotter again, for it had somehow disappeared into the capacious pocket of the so-called countryman.

It may be wondered at that he should have stolen the blotter, but he had a reason for it.

He had noticed something on it that he believed would prove of value to him.

It was the imprint of a line of writing which had been taken off by the blotter, while the ink was wet, and it read as follows:

"Received of S. Einstein & Co., three bags of gold-dust, valued at—"

The rest of the sentence could not be read on account of coming on a portion of the blotter which had been used so much that it

had become black from the multiplicity of impressions from writings, but in another portion was the signature, "Harrison W. Higgins."

The lines were reversed, of course, and would have meant nothing to a casual observer, but in connection with the other facts he had gleaned, they meant a great deal to the detective.

If the girl missed the blotter, she never admitted it, and Thad was about leaving the place, when he repeated his request:

"I do hope ye'll tell him to meet me thar this arternoon sure, ez I want to git away to-night, an' I don't want to go without a bag er two o' thet shinin' stuff."

"I'll be sure to tell him as soon as he comes in," she promised, "and I have no doubt he will call on you at once."

"Thanks. I do hope ye will. Good-day, miss."

And away he went.

Thad then went directly to the Madison House on Fourth avenue, near Twenty-fourth street, and registered the name and address he had put on the book in the office on Grand street.

He was shown to a small room, and here he bided his time pending the arrival of the Jew.

Several hours passed and it was approaching night, when finally there came a knock at the door. On opening it, the call-boy handed him a card. The card bore the simple inscription:

S. EINSTEIN & CO.,

Brokers.

There was no address on the card.

Thad told the boy to show the gentleman up, and presently there was another rap at the door and a gentleman was ushered into the room.

To Burr's surprise and disappointment, it was not the Jew, but the tall young man whom he had seen in company with the old countryman.

Nevertheless the detective said, as he shook his hand:

"Mr. Einstein, I s'pose?"

"No, my name is Shaw," explained the tall young man. "I used one of the firm's cards because I didn't happen to have any of my own. This is Mr. Beesly, I presume?"

"Thet's what most people calls me," grinned Thad, "'cep my gal, an' she calls me Miar or Jerry. Ye see my full name's Jeremiah."

"So I see by the register, Mr. Beesly."

"Wal, take a cheer an' sot down an' make yerself to home."

"Thanks," rejoined the young man politely, as he took the proffered chair. "Let's see, you called at the office this afternoon, didn't you, Mr. Beesly?"

"Yas, I heered as how you hed some gold-dust to sell cheap for cash, an' I wanted to git some."

"Yes, we have a little left," replied the other indifferently. "It has been going pretty fast lately. About how much do you want?"

"Thet depends on how much it'll cost."

The young man reflected a little and then asked:

"How much have you got to invest, Mr. Beesly?"

"Wal, as I said, thet depends. I'd like to take about three good sized bags, if it don't go above my pile."

"I understand, but how much money have you altogether?"

Thad knew he was coming to that, and was prepared for him.

"I dunno's I ought to tell strangers how much I've got about me, Mr. Shaw," he drawled with a broad grin. "Pap told me to be mighty keerful 'bout showin' my money er talkin' 'bout it afore strangers."

"But you need have no fear of me," observed the sharper with obsequious politeness. "I assure you that I am a perfect gentleman. I can refer you to the best men in the city. It will be necessary, you know, to know how much you have before I can tell whether it will be worth while for me to do business with you. We do no small business. It doesn't pay us."

"Thet's whut I thought, an' fer thet reason I brought a hull lot o' money along."

"About how much?"

"Wal—I kinder hate to tell."

"Oh, very well," growled Shaw, with assumed indignation, rising. "If you are not willing to trust me, there is no use of our wasting time in talking. I guess you don't want to invest anyway."

"Yas, I do, an' seein' thet ye're a gentleman, I don't mind tellin' ye how much I've got with me. I sold my farm in Warrick County, Indiana fer nigh onto ten thousand dollars, an' I fotch the most on it with me. Will thet be worth while, mister?"

The fellow shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, yes, we sometimes make as small a transaction as that, and as you appear to be anxious to procure some of the dust, we will accommodate you this time. We would like to advertise our business in your section a little anyway."

"Thanks. How much dust will I git fer thet much money?"

"You have less than ten thousand, I take it?"

"Yas, I reckon thar's about nine thousand."

"Let me see," reflected the tall man. "Four times nine are thirty-six. We will give you gold-dust to the amount of thirty-six thousand dollars."

"Great Jemimy! Thet's a hull lot of money, ain't it?" ejaculated the pretended countryman, with a broad grin.

"Yes, it's a nice little fortune, and remember we are giving you four dollars for one."

"So I see, an' it's powerful kind of ye to do it."

"Well, give me the money," said the tall man with a business air, "and I'll soon fix you out."

"Yas, drawled Thad, hesitatingly, "but when do I git the dust?"

"Oh, I'll send it up to you here," said the other lightly.

"No, siree! I want to see whut I'm buyin' afore I lay out my good money."

"Very well, then, let me have the money, and you can accompany me to the office where I'll show you the gold-dust."

"I'll go with you," assented the detective, "but durn my cats if I let go my money till I see the dust!"

"Why, you are the most suspicious man I ever saw. Thousands of men do business with me every day, and you are the first one that refused to trust me."

"Wal, I can't help it. I waz jes' brought up thet way, an' you hev my final answer."

"Oh, well, if you are so suspicious as all that, have it your way. Come with me to the office and I will satisfy you about the gold-dust, after which you can give me the money."

"That's the way to talk. I'm with ye."

And a few moments later the two men left the hotel together.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHAIR OF DEATH.

AT Shaw's suggestion, the two men took a closed carriage in which to drive to the office on Grand street, for, as he said, whenever the police saw a well-dressed man in company with a countryman they were apt to suspect that something was wrong.

"Why should they think that?" asked Thad, innocently.

"Oh, you see," explained the young man, "there are bad men in the city who make it a business to swindle men from the country by all kinds of crooked games, and the police are on the look-out for them."

"Crooked games? What d'ye mean by thet?" asked Thad with wide-open eyes.

"Oh, transactions that are not honest," replied the sharper impatiently. "For instance, there is the green-goods game."

"Whut's thet?"

"Have you never heard of the green-goods game?"

"Nope."

"Why, these sharpers send out circulars to certain Reubens through the country—"

"Reubens?" interrupted the alleged hayseed.

"Countrymen, then. They send these circulars to green countrymen claiming to have counterfeit money which they will sell very cheap, and the countrymen, being dishonest enough to pass counterfeit money if

they had it, bite at the bait, come in town, give up their good money and get a carpet-bag full of green paper in exchange."

"An' it ain't money at all?"

"Certainly not."

"Not even counterfeit money?"

"No, nothing but plain green paper with a five dollar bill wrapped round the outside."

"Wal, I'll swow! Thet's real downright swindlin, ain't it?"

"Certainly."

"But of course you folks don't do nothin' like thet?"

"Of course not. We give you what we agree to give, real gold-dust. The only thing about it is, that the dust was smuggled, and the police would arrest us if they knew we were dealing in it."

"I see."

A few minutes later they arrived at the Grand street office, and the pretended hayseed was conducted up-stairs to the office.

It was now about seven o'clock in the evening, and the young man unlocked the door with a key which he took from his pocket, and Thad was surprised to find the room in darkness.

The young man lit the gas, however, and as he did so, the detective seated himself on a stool he found handy.

Shaw bustled about for some moments, unlocked the safe and took out the register in which the countryman had written the fictitious name and address, and putting it on the counter, asked Thad if that was his signature.

He said that it was, and then the young man sat down at a desk and pretended to be writing.

This continued for the space of half an hour, and then there was the sound of a key in the lock of the door and the identical short man whom Burr had seen before came in.

He appeared to be greatly surprised to see the countryman there and apologized for intruding.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said. "I was not aware that you had company, Harry."

"It's all right, Frank," observed the tall man. "Mr. Carpenter, allow me to introduce you to my very good friend, Mr. Beesly, of Indiana. Mr. Beesly, this is Mr. Carpenter. Mr. Beesly is desirous of purchasing some of our gold-dust, Frank," pursued Shaw, as the two men shook hands.

"Ah!" cried the short man with a bland smile. "Well, I guess we can accommodate him."

"I was just wondering whether we have enough here for him," resumed Shaw.

"I guess we have, unless he wants a terrible lot."

"Mr. Beesley does want a good deal."

"Yes?"

And the short man's eyes glistened with anticipation.

"Yes, he wants a matter of thirty six thousand dollars' worth. Is t here that much here?"

"That's a pretty big lump, but I think there is something like that or a little more there. Look in the safe, Harry."

Harry went to the safe and soon brought out three pretty good-sized canvas bags and set them on the counter. He then opened one and took out a handful of shining dust, which caused the countryman's eyes to sparkle, as he got up and approached the counter.

Burr wore a broad grin, and chuckled gloatingly as he examined the dust.

"By gol!" he exclaimed. "Thet's purty nice, ain't it?"

"Eighteen carat gold," rejoined Shaw, indifferently.

"I reckon thar's no question 'bout it bein' ginnywine," observed the alleged countryman, taking some in his hand and examining it.

"None whatever," asserted the short man. "However, if you have any doubt in the matter, we have acids here to test it. Harry, bring that acid."

Harry brought a bottle of acid, and some of the metal was tested. Burr saw at once that it was pure gold, but knew that there was only a layer of it at the top of the bag, and the rest was some worthless stuff.

"That's mighty finestuff," he chuckled.

"Couldn't be finer," replied Harry.

"But, is it the same all the way down to the bottom o' the bag?"

Both men affected to become very angry at this insinuation, and Shaw exclaimed:

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I only want to know whether it's the same kind o' truck all the way down, or whether it's partly filled up with somethin' else," drawled the countryman.

"Do you mean to insinuate that we would be guilty of anything of that kind, sir?" bawled Shaw, with well-simulated rage.

"I dunno 'bout thet," giggled Thad. "Ye see ye told me 'bout the green-goods men's tricks while ago, and thet kinder put me onter my guard. Ef it's all right, you fellers hasn't nothin' to fear er git mad at, an' I don't see why ye want er git riled anyway."

"That is true, my dear friend," rejoined Shaw, pretending to calm down all of a sudden. "I spoke too quick, and I hope you'll forgive me for it. Certainly we can have no objection to your knowing exactly what is in the bag. In fact we want you to be satisfied before you pay out your money. Now we know what is in that bag, we'll open another," he went on, starting to open the next one.

"No, I'll be gol-darned if I do. You may know whut's in thar, but yours truly don't know nothin' 'bout it."

"Why you're the worst crank I ever saw," growled Shaw, affecting to get angry again.

"You're afraid of your shadow."

"Thet's jest whut's the matter. I'm afeared thet gold dust'll turn out to be a shadder if I don't examine it afore I leave here."

"You have examined it, what more do you want?"

"I've only examined the top. Let me see the rest on it, an' if thet's es sound es the top, ye'll git yer money, an' not afore. D'ye understand thet?"

The two men looked at each other with mutual expressions of consternation.

They were evidently in a dilemma as to what to do with this kicking countryman.

Finally Carpenter seemed to be favored with a sudden inspiration, for he smiled a little more blandly than usual as he said:

"Well, Harry, there is but one way of satisfying this fellow, and that is to pour the dust out on the table and allow him to examine it to his heart's content."

The wink exchanged by the two sharpers was not lost on the acute detective, but he affected not to see it, and cried enthusiastically:

"Thet's the wheat! Soon's it's poured out, I kin tell whut's whut, an' then you'll git yer money."

"Listen!" said Harry, pretending to hear something. "Was that the sound of somebody coming up-stairs?"

"I didn't hear it," rejoined Frank. "I'll see."

"Do, by all means. It would be all up with all three of us if the police should come in upon us just now."

And both men affected to be greatly frightened, while Frank stole on tiptoe to the door and affected to listen.

"By Jove!" he cried with well-feigned excitement.

"What is it?" gasped the other.

"There is somebody coming up stairs as sure as I'm a sinner."

"How many do they appear to be?"

"From the tread I should say a dozen."

"Heavens! What is to be done?"

"We've got to hide!"

"That's so, and that quickly!" cried Harry, pretending to be so badly frightened as scarcely to know what he was doing. "Where shall we go, Frank?"

"You and Mr. Beesly get into the closet there, and I'll hide under the counter here."

"But what are we to do with the dust?" queried Harry.

"I'll take that under with me."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when sure enough, there came a vigorous rapping at the door, accompanied by a hoarse voice demanding instantaneous admission.

"My God!" groaned Harry. "Come, Mr. Beesly, hurry and get into this closet, or we are goners!"

To the astonishment of the two rascals, the

green countryman was apparently not the least frightened, and stood calmly looking on while they were frisking about the room like a couple of madmen, pretending to be panic-stricken.

"Why don't you hurry?" bawled Frank. "Don't stand there like an idiot! Do you want to be arrested and locked up?"

"Whut's the matter?" he drawled at last.

"Matter! You infernal blockhead! Don't you hear the police knocking at the door?"

"Wal, whut of it?"

"Why, they'll arrest the lot of us, if we don't hide before they break the door down and come in."

"No, they won't 'rest me," he drawled indifferently. "I ain't done nothin', an' they daren't arrest me."

"They will just the same if they find you in here. You'll stand no more show of escape than we will. Come, hurry up, I tell you!"

"Yes, hurry up here and get in!" cried Harry excitedly, grasping him by the lapel of the coat, and attempting to drag him along.

"Hol' on!" he cried. "Don't tear my coat! Let me go, I say, an' I'll go 'long!"

Harry released him, and he started for the closet.

The tall man preceded him and opened the door.

The first thing that attracted his attention was a large wooden chair that stood at one end of the closet, and the sharp eyes of the detective were not slow in noticing a strip of brass running along the back in a manner to exactly correspond with the sitter's spine. His keen vision also caught sight of a number of holes at equal distances apart and so small that any eyes but his own would have failed to see them.

"Hurry up and get in there!" urged Harry, as he saw Thad pause to look at the chair. "We've not a minute to spare!"

"That's a powerful funny cheer ye've got thar," drawled the hayseed.

"Yes, but never mind the chair now. Get in and look at the chair to your heart's content after the coppers are gone."

Meanwhile the banging at the door continued, increasing in vehemence momentarily.

"Confound it, hurry, I tell you!" growled Harry. "It looks as if you were determined to get us into trouble!"

"I hope not for my own sake," he drawled, as he stepped into the closet cautiously as though he were afraid of the floor going through with him.

The instant he was inside the tall man also stepped in and closed the doors.

"Now let them come," he said in a tone of relief. "They are not apt to find us here."

"Don't ye think they might come in here?" asked Thad.

"You see Frank will turn off the gas and they won't know where to go."

The detective pretended not to notice the absurdity of this assertion, and the sharper did not appear to think that any fool would know that the police would not enter a place for the purpose of raiding it, without striking a light the first thing.

The knocking at the door still continued, and it would have struck anybody with an ounce of brains as strange that the intruders did not break in the door and come in, instead of standing there knocking all night, but the tall man did not appear to see anything unusual in the proceeding.

It was intensely dark in the closet and there was scarcely room for the two men to stand between the end of the small inclosure and the chair which stood at the other end.

Shaw had managed to get the detective nearest the chair, and they had not been in the place but a second or two when he said:

"It's pretty close in here, Mr. Beesly, for two men to stand. Suppose you sit down in the chair. It will be more comfortable, as we may have to stand here for some time."

"Do ye think so?" asked the countryman with apparent concern.

"I'm afraid so. You see when they get in they will hang around till they have made a pretty thorough search of the place."

"An' I'll be too late for my train, I'm afraid."

"Oh, well, there are trains going at every hour or two. And for that matter, it won't

put you out much if you don't get off till tomorrow morning. Sit down."

As he uttered the last words, he gave the detective a gentle push, and he sunk into the fatal chair.

The instant he touched the seat a pair of clamps came around him in front, pinioning him fast in the chair so that he could hardly move.

At the same instant the door flew open and Shaw sprung out of the closet and closed the doors after him.

"That will soon settle him," observed Harry.

"Did you get him into the chair?" asked Frank with a chuckle.

"Tight and fast and the needles turned on," laughed Harry.

For some strange reason the pounding at the door ceased, and all became quiet.

"Well, we'll have to wait for a few minutes, I suppos," observed Frank with another laugh.

"Yes, about ten minutes. It takes about that long for the chair to do its work."

"And then we will be at liberty to help ourselves to his boodle."

"That's what."

"How much did he say he had?" asked Frank more seriously.

"About nine thousand dollars."

"A pretty good night's work, eh, old boy?"

"Rather."

"By the way, wouldn't it be a good idea to notify the Seven while we're waiting? That will preclude the possibility of the police coming upon us. You know what a narrow escape we had the other night."

"Yes. You take a cab and hurry over after them, and I'll stay here," replied Harry.

"All right," said the other, "but no monkey work, mind."

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE.

If the two rascals had known what was going on inside the closet during their conversation, they would probably have been less jocose in their manner.

They had not the least idea but what the "hayseed," as they were led to believe he was, was very near his end by the time that Frank got ready to leave the building.

The fatal chair had been used upon hundreds and never was known to fail to do its deadly work with perfect satisfaction, so why should they suspect it of failure now?

The fact was, the machine had done its work as usual. The only trouble was that the detective, knowing in theory what the nature of these men's mode of putting their victims to death was, had prepared to foil its workings.

Before putting on the suit of rustic clothes he had taken pains to put an extra lining in the back of his vest, and the lining he had put in was in the nature of a strip of thin steel about six inches wide which was shoved inside of the lining in such a position that it would thoroughly protect the spinal column from anything short of a cannon ball.

Thus equipped, he had seated himself in the chair from which no man before had ever risen alive, with as much security as he would have done in his own easy-chair at home.

When Shaw had felt him sink into the chair and knew that he was secure, he had touched an electric button which set in motion a powerful piece of machinery, and the next instant Thad felt a jar of something coming against his back with such force as to give him a temporary shock, but that was the extent of the damage. The needles had struck against the steel plate and could go no further.

He could not help laughing to himself to think what a surprise he had in store for the rascals, but he had not long to devote to this reflection.

So far he was safe. The needles had been warded off, and in all probability broken, but he was still firmly bound in the chair by the automatic clamp, and his next thought was how to extricate himself.

He could feel that the clasps were of some sort of metal, and while his hands were free,

there was no such thing as cutting away the confining arms that clung about him.

But he reflected that they might not be very strong as the men who were confined there were supposed to be stricken with total paralysis an instant later and could not struggle.

Going upon this hypothesis, he began to struggle with all the strength he possessed.

But he found this to be useless. The clasps would not yield.

Then he set to work coolly examining the mechanism of the clasps by the sense of feeling.

He found that they were made in a semi-circular shape and locked together in the center. But it was in vain that he tried to unlock them in the darkness.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him. He could get his hands to his pockets, and he was not long in finding a box of matches. Striking one of these, he made a hasty survey of his surroundings and another examination of the clasps.

He saw at once that there was no such thing as unlocking the latter without some outside agency, but in his survey of the walls of the closet he noticed that there were two buttons side by side.

He supposed one of these to be the means by which Shaw had set the machine in motion, but he could not imagine what the other was for. He could reach the buttons by straining forward to the fullest extent, and he did not see that he could put himself in worse condition by experimenting with them.

Stretching forward as far as he could, he touched one of the buttons, and the next instant a whirring sound was heard directly behind him and then a similar shock to what he had felt before along his back notified him that the needles had struck again, but with the same harmless result. He then hastily lighted another match, and while it burned bent forward and touched the other button.

The next instant he was thrown head-first out of the chair upon the floor.

This was occasioned by the strain with which he was leaning upon the clasps when they let go and flew apart.

He quickly picked himself up from the floor and listened to see if he could ascertain what was going on outside.

Everything was quiet, and he concluded that Carpenter had gone after the mutes to come and get his body.

"They will find a pretty live corpse," he laughed to himself, and then putting his ear to the door listened again.

He could hear the scratching of a pen, and knew that Shaw must be engaged in writing.

"Now is my time," he thought, and tried the door.

It was only latched, not locked, and he opened it a little way and peeped out.

He could see the back of Shaw, who was sitting at a desk on the opposite side of the room.

Drawing his revolver, he stepped quickly from the closet.

So quiet had been his action that the sharper did not notice it, and he proceeded to steal, pistol in hand, across the room toward the fellow.

In another instant he was within a yard of him, and, pushing the revolver against the back of his head, cried in a low, terrible voice:

"Throw up your hands, or you are a dead man!"

The fellow jumped as if he had been shot, and sprang to his feet.

When his eyes fell upon the so-called countryman with a revolver in his hand, Shaw almost fainted with terror.

He evidently believed him to be a spirit.

"My God! What is it?" he groaned.

"It's no ghost, I can assure you," rejoined the detective.

The fellow was speechless, and stared at him as though his eyes would burst from their sockets.

"Hold out your hands here!" commanded Burr, at the same time taking a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

It was not till then that Shaw appeared to realize the truth, and his scared expression gave place to a dark scowl, as he growled:

"Tricked, by Heaven!"

"Yes, old fellow," laughed the detec-

tive, "and very neatly too. You'll be a little careful how you monkey with hayseeds after this, won't you?"

The fellow made no reply, and surlily put out his hands to receive the irons.

Not a word more passed between them until after the handcuffs were snapped upon Shaw's wrists, and then he muttered:

"You're a good one, you are. You're the first detective that ever got the best of me."

"That may be, and I have to come across the first crook yet whom I couldn't get the best of."

"Who the deuce are you, anyway?" asked Shaw.

"You would like to know, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I would, by Jove! I'd like to know the name of the man who could pass through what you have and live."

"Is that all?"

"Yes. Curiosity, that's all."

"You don't think you would know me again, do you?"

"No, certainly not."

"I don't think you would. At the same time, I don't deem it prudent to tell you who I am. You might get a chance to whisper my name to some of your pals, and that would cause them to leave town before I get the darbies on them."

"Say no more," said the sharper with a ghastly smile. "I know you now. There is but one man in New York who can make a crook take to the brush, and that is Thad Burr. But how the deuce did you manage to escape the terrors of that chair?"

"Why, if you know who I am, you know that I am proof against all the death-engines of you fellows."

"By George, I believe you! You are the only man who ever sat in that chair and came out of it alive."

"I am willing to believe that. I have had the pleasure of seeing some of its work."

"You have?"

"Yes, within the past few days, too."

"Great Scott! You don't mean to tell me that you are the same man who went into the Silent Seven's den and took the remains of the old hayseed, do you?"

"Perhaps I am, and perhaps I am not. At all events, I have seen some of your horrible work, and that is how I knew the secret of your deadly chair."

"Great Heavens! Then the end of the gang is not far off. I would not—"

But at that juncture there came the sharp click of a key turning in the lock of the outside door, and Shaw turned with the quickness of lightning and opened his mouth, probably, to give his pal some warning, but Burr was too quick for him, and before a sound issued from his lips clapped his hand over his mouth and smothered it.

Then with the other hand he shoved his revolver into his face and hissed:

"Make the least sound, and you are a dead man!"

The next instant Carpenter entered the room, and before he had time to take in the situation, Thad had him covered with his revolver.

He had no more than done so, however, when six of the mutes filed in after the outlaw.

Thad was about to call upon Carpenter to surrender, when Shaw, whom he had been compelled to leave, called out:

"Make your escape, Frank! We're tricked. This fellow is a detective!"

This came so unexpectedly that Thad was a little disconcerted, and then the six mutes, as if they had heard what Harry had said, sprung as one man at the detective and pinioned his arms before he had time to act.

Meanwhile Frank, who had by this time recovered from his panic, drew his revolver and placed it in unpleasantly close proximity of the Vidoq's head.

"I guess we'll have a hand in this little game," he hissed. "You may be a very keen fellow, but you are hardly a match for this crowd. Drop that gun, and drop it quick, or down comes your mutton!"

There was nothing else to do, and Burr dropped his revolver, which was picked up by one of the mutes.

"Now then," resumed Carpenter, "we'll treat you to a taste of your own medicine."

So saying, he put his hand in Thad's

pocket and took out another pair of handcuffs, which he had provided for Carpenter himself, and in a wink had them snapped upon his wrists.

"Now, we'll give you another trial of the chair," promised Frank. "You appear to have escaped it by some miracle before, but we'll see that you fare differently this time."

"It's no use, Frank," objected Harry. "This is Detective Burr."

"I don't care a snap if it was Detective Thorn or Detective Briar," muttered Carpenter, facetiously. "He's made of tougher metal than mortal was ever made if he withstands the chair this time."

"But you see that he did withstand it before."

"That was by some trick of his. We'll look out for that this time, and see that he doesn't play his game on us."

He then, with the assistance of the mutes, whom he had instructed by some secret sign, proceeded to push the detective toward the closet again.

Thad thought it was all up with him this time, sure.

He had but one hope, and that was that they wouldn't discover the shield in the lining of his vest.

"You'd better see if the machine is all right, Frank, before you put him in the chair," admonished Harry. "My opinion is that he has done something to it."

"I'll look to that," replied Frank in a glum voice.

Lighting a lamp which stood on the counter, he went to the closet and commenced a careful examination of the chair and the machine that operated it.

He had not been long at this when he muttered:

"You're right, Harry. He's contrived some way to snap every needle off short."

"The deuce he has!"

"Come see for yourself."

Frank, still with the darbies on his wrists, strode over to the closet and took a look at the machine.

"So he has," he growled. "What is to be done?"

"New needles must be put in."

"And there is no one here to do it."

"Yes, Buckley, the mute there, knows all about it. We'll put him at it at once."

One of the mutes, a vicious-looking fellow, was beckoned to come over, and Frank explained to him in his own mute language what was to be done.

The fellow took off his coat, and setting the lamp on the seat of the chair, set to work removing the broken needles. Meanwhile Frank had gone to a drawer and brought a box of new ones. Burr noticed that they did not differ materially from ordinary fine needles, except that they were about twice as long, and in lieu of the eye, were provided with a sort of shank similar to that of a bit.

Handing them to the mute, the latter was not long in adjusting them in the back of the chair.

Then turning to Burr, Frank said:

"Get in there, sir, and see how you will fare this time."

As he spoke he grasped the detective and pushed him along, assisted by a number of the mutes.

He was soon in the chair again, and he trembled a little for fear they might think of searching his back for the cause of the needles being broken, but he was pushed in the chair and the clamps again closed on him, and still it appeared never to have occurred to any of them.

As soon as he was securely pinioned in the chair, Frank stepped outside and said:

"Now, my clever fellow, if you have anything to say before shuffling off, you had better be quick about it, for in five minutes you will cross the dark river."

"Stop," cried Harry at this juncture.

"What's the matter?" growled Frank, turning upon him with a scowling face.

"I have an idea."

"You're always having ideas that come in just in time to cause delay."

"But this one will prevent delay, or what is better, prevent a second failure, most likely."

"Well, out with it."

"Hasn't it occurred to you that there was a cause for those needles being broken off?"

"Oh, I know he must have had some way of breaking them, but there is no time to look into that row."

"Then possibly he will do the same thing again. Look here, Frank, you know that a man sitting in that chair couldn't break those needles with his hands."

"How else did he do it then?"

"He's got something in his clothing, a piece of iron or something, which the needles could not penetrate. You had better search him before turning on the current."

CHAPTER XI.

THE PALE-HORSE.

CARPENTER appeared to be stricken dumb with Shaw's suggestion, and stood irresolute for several minutes before either speaking or moving.

At length he uttered a terrible oath, and exclaimed:

"That's an idea, sure enough. Why the blazes didn't it occur to me? I'll soon see whether your suggestion or theory is correct or not."

With that he pressed one of the buttons and the clasps were unlatched.

Then grasping the detective by the shoulder roughly, he uttered savagely:

"Come out of here, sir, and let us see what there is in your clothing."

Thad, partially of his own volition and partly by the force of the outlaw's jerk, stepped out of the chair and out of the closet.

Making a sign to the mutes, Frank indicated what he wished them to do, and four or five of them set to removing his coat as best they could with his hands bound.

When they had pulled it down pretty well behind, Carpenter put his hand on the detective's back, and exclaimed:

"Yes, Harry, you were right. Here's a piece of metal as broad as your two hands inside of his vest."

Then making another motion to the mutes, he stepped aside while they proceeded to rip open the back of Thad's vest.

In another instant the strip of steel was removed and handed to Frank. He took the shield and held it up, saying with a sarcastic grin:

"See! No wonder the needles were snapped off like so many pieces of ginger-bread! But he won't have a chance to play that trick on us again."

"He must have known something about the workings of the machine to have known how to prepare for it in that way," suggested Harry.

"Undoubtedly," replied Frank, surlily. "Now we'll put him back and see what he will do with it."

So saying, he made another gesture to the mutes, who immediately grasped the helpless detective and thrust him back into the chair.

Then Carpenter touched one of the buttons and the clamps were once more closed around him.

"I won't give you any time for preparation this time, old fellow," he muttered, and with the rapidity of lightning he touched the other button, and as quickly stepped out and closed the doors of the closet.

All this time Thad had never once winced or shown the slightest tremor of fear.

As Carpenter glanced at him just as he was about to touch the fatal button, he was exasperated to see a smile of defiance on the brave fellow's face.

"That chap has the nerve of the Old Scratch!" he growled, as he closed the doors.

Meanwhile Thad had given up all hope of escape, but was determined that these villains should see nothing of his weakness, nor did they.

Instantly after Carpenter had touched the last button the machine began its whirring sound, and Burr shut his eyes and resigned himself to his fate.

In another instant, he thought, he would be no more.

But he waited in vain.

It seemed that it was not to be, for after a second or two the whirring stopped, and he had felt no shock.

What could it mean?

Meanwhile there appeared to be a great commotion outside.

He could hear the constant shuffling of feet and the clatter of voices, which seemed to indicate that there were more than Shaw and Carpenter, then suddenly it became quiet. The talking ceased, the sounds of shuffling feet could no more be heard and a stillness like that of the grave followed.

Burr wondered what it could mean.

But he was soon to know.

A moment later some one stole quietly to the closet, opened the door and peeped in.

The detective had hit upon a plan of action just in the nick of time, and put it in execution. When the person looked into the closet he found, to all appearances, the man in the chair as dead as a herring.

Thad had his eyes shut and could not see who the person was, but he noticed that the moment he looked inside he turned and gave some kind of a signal, and as no word was uttered, he decided that the person was one of the mutes.

In response to the signal the whole crowd came trooping to the closet door and peeped in.

Then followed a moment of breathless silence, after which Shaw, who still had the handcuffs on his wrists, said in a low voice:

"He must be dead by this time."

"No question about it," replied Carpenter.

"It seems a pity to kill a brave fellow like that."

"It does indeed. But what could we do? If we hadn't done him, he would have had us in the toils long before this."

"That is true. Still, one can't help admiring a fearless chap like that, and if it were to do over, I'll swear I'd vote for letting him go, under promise of never molesting us again."

"That would never do," said Carpenter.

"Why?"

"Because he would not only not keep his word, but knowing the ins and outs of our system, he would have double advantage. No, it is better that he is out of the way."

"But others will follow."

"Undoubtedly. But there was but one Thad Burr."

As he ceased speaking Frank gave a signal, and one of the mutes entered the closet and proceeded to feel the detective's pulse.

Thad knew that he must know at once that he was not dead, and wondered what the result would be. The mute put his finger on Burr's wrist, where he must have found the pulse as strong as it had ever been, but he appeared not to be satisfied with that, and placed his hand over the detective's heart. He certainly must have discovered a healthy action there, nevertheless he turned to the crowd and made a solemn bow, which seemed to indicate that he had found the victim dead, for they all came, one at a time, and peeped in again, after which the mute closed the door.

Then followed a general shuffling of feet, accompanied by considerable talk on the part of the two sharpers, and then Burr could hear the whole crowd taking its leave.

From the stillness which succeeded this, Thad concluded that they must have left him entirely alone, and he wondered how long he would be compelled to stay here in that uncomfortable position before they would come and release him.

But when he thought of his final release he could not repress a shudder, for he knew that they would then discover that he was still alive and undoubtedly finish him.

Thus hours went by, and still no sound came to him.

It must have been far into the night, but night and day were all one to him in that dark place.

Suddenly a happy thought came to him.

Notwithstanding the handcuffs, as his hands were in front of him, he could still use them to some extent, and he thought of the button which he had pressed before and released himself.

What was to hinder him from repeating

the operation? The idea no sooner suggested itself than it was put in execution.

He found it a little more difficult to reach the button this time, on account of a certain stiffness of his limbs due to the long confinement, but he finally succeeded by the utmost straining to reach and touch the button with the tip of his finger, and again he was thrown forward almost upon his face on the bottom of the closet.

However, he was free so far, and quickly scrambled to his feet. He had no trouble in opening the doors of the closet, and he was soon in the room again.

It was very dark, and at first he thought he must be alone, but an instant later he became convinced to the contrary by a suspicious noise. It was the sound of some one snoring.

Thad paused and listened to make sure that he had not been mistaken, and was soon convinced that he had not.

The regular breathing of some one was as distinct as he had ever heard it, and the person appeared to be very low down—probably on the floor. Another thing he was anxious to ascertain, and that was whether there were more than one person. He could hear but the one, but for all that, there might have been more.

His first thought was to steal softly to the door and make his escape, but when he reached it, he found it securely locked, and it would be impossible to force it without awaking the sleeper or sleepers even if his hands had been free.

The detective paused to reflect.

At length he had resolved upon a desperate move.

He remembered the box of matches in his pocket, and with some difficulty he got hold of it and struck one of the matches and held it as far aloft as his bound hands would permit of.

The room was sufficiently illuminated to allow him to survey the position of affairs. The first thing that attracted his attention was a bed or pallet on the floor, formed of blankets, upon which two of the mutes were peacefully reposing. He looked about for more, and was gratified to discover that there were no more. Experience had taught the detective that these mutes could be awakened by a sharp concussion, such as a sudden crash or heavy sound, as well as people who could hear, and he realized that his movements must be as cautious as possible.

If he could only get rid of the handcuffs, he thought, he might be able to do something, but he knew perfectly well that they could only be unlocked with a key, and never imagining that the irons would be put upon himself, it had not occurred to him to bring a key with him.

Meanwhile he had been lighting match after match and holding them up to survey his surroundings.

At length his eyes fell upon the counter where they had been testing the gold-dust. The rascals had removed the bags of dust, but they had forgotten one thing, and that one thing was a godsend to Thad.

It was the bottle of acid.

He was something of a chemist and was well acquainted with the nature of the powerful acid, and knew that, while it was as impotent as water in its action on gold, it would devour iron or steel as readily as fire will wood.

A thrill of delight went over him at sight of the bottle, and he stepped quickly to the side of the counter. As he did so, his eye fell upon something else. It was a drawer, half drawn out, and in it lay a couple of revolvers.

The acquisition of the pistols, which were well loaded, invested him with a new sense of security, and he boldly touched a match to the gas and lighted it.

He was not far from the door and about twenty feet from the sleeping guards, and the counter was between them. So, with the possession of the revolvers, he felt that he might work with composure, and went at it with a will.

Opening the bottle of acid, he took the brush used for applying the stuff to articles to be tested and painted a narrow stripe around each one of the bands which encircled his wrists.

"It will not take it long to eat its way through," he mused, "and in the mean time

I will try the stuff on the bolt of that door."

So saying, he stepped softly to the door and applied a good portion of the acid to the heavy bolt which held the door.

Having completed this part of the work, he could not help chuckling to himself to think how his enemies would be surprised when they discovered his disappearance.

He turned from the door and was about approaching the counter again, when he was almost paralyzed at the sight that met his gaze.

The two mutes had awoke and were standing on the opposite side of the counter, staring at him as though unable to credit their own eyes.

And, to make matters worse for the detective, he had carelessly left the two revolvers on the counter, and within the grasp of the mutes.

Thad saw that, unless he acted promptly, the jig was up with him, and while they were still apparently dazed with their unexpected discovery, he made a sudden bound toward the counter with the intention of securing the revolvers.

But he had miscalculated.

His action, so far from adding to their stupefaction, had the opposite effect and brought them to their senses. Instantly grasping the revolvers, they covered the approaching detective, and gave unmistakable indications that it would not be prudent for him to come any nearer.

It was a terrible moment.

What was to be done?

For an instant Burr's brain swam, and he could think of no way out of his difficulty.

He had paused as soon as he found himself in the power of his enemies, and they evinced no inclination to shoot so long as he remained motionless.

This lasted for perhaps a minute, and then one of the mutes made a motion with his head indicating that he desired the detective to go back to the closet.

After a second's reflection, Thad decided that it would be the better plan, and it would give him an opportunity to devise some new scheme.

He no longer had any fear of the fatal chair, as he was convinced that it was out of order in some way, so he nodded a humble submission, and started around the counter as if intending to go quietly to the closet.

Meanwhile he never for an instant took his eyes off the two guards, who still kept the pistols pointed at him, hoping that they might at some moment relax their vigilance and give him an opportunity to act. But they did not, even for a single instant, and he made his way demurely to the closet for the third time that night.

He was about to step inside, when one of the mutes said something in his silent language to the other, and he, in turn, placed his hand on Burr's shoulder as an indication that he wished him to stop.

The fellow then went inside and appeared to be making an examination of the machine, but as it was very dark, he finally came out, shook his head and then went for the lamp, which was standing on the counter.

In the mean time the other mute never for an instant relaxed his watch upon Thad, and kept his pistol pointed close to his head.

The other fellow finally returned with the lighted lamp and went inside of the closet and made another examination, after which he came out and appeared to be explaining to his mate that the machine was broken.

Then ensued a long discussion upon their fingers, not a word of which could Thad understand, for, while he understood the deaf and dumb alphabet, they spoke in a language which was utterly unintelligible to him.

The outcome of it appeared to be, however, that he was to go back in the chair anyway. But again the fellow who had first suggested the examination called a halt, and, taking the lamp, went inside. In a moment he returned grinning and smirking, and Thad understood the melancholy fact that he had discovered the trouble with the machine and remedied it.

This filled them with delight, but the other was not satisfied till he had examined the machine again himself.

He appeared to be satisfied that there could be no failure this time, and the two pushed Burr into the closet once more.

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

THAD saw there could be no failure in the working of the machine this time, and determined not to enter the chair.

On the other hand, the mutes were so confident that he would meekly submit, that they did not take the precautions that they would have done had they suspected that he would offer any resistance.

The detective was not slow to recognize this fact, and watched his opportunity.

He had got inside the closet, and one of the mutes attempted to push him down into the chair, while the other, who had been keeping guard all the while, thinking this was no longer necessary, lowered his revolver.

Thad now saw that it was his time for action.

Just as the fellow put his hand upon him to shove him down, he suddenly turned, snapped the handcuffs from his wrists (they having been eaten through by the acid by this time), and with one terrific blow sent the fellow reeling to the floor.

The succeeding second he made a dash for the other one, snatched the revolver from his hand and dealt him a fearful blow over the head with it which sent him sprawling.

Nor was he satisfied with this.

He was determined that the men should give him no further trouble, and having no handcuffs with him, he procured some strong cords which he found in the place, and securely bound them hand and foot. Knowing that it would be safe to leave them in this condition, he went outside, and, finding a policeman, had him send in a call for the patrol wagon.

By the time Thad got back up-stairs again, day was breaking, and, having had no sleep for more than forty-eight hours, he was seized with an irresistible drowsiness. He knew he would be compelled to wait some time for the patrol, so he sat down in an easy-chair and almost immediately fell asleep.

How long it was before the patrol arrived, and the police came up-stairs, he could not tell, but it could not have been more than a few minutes, and he was still peacefully sleeping when they aroused him.

"Wal, whar's yer prisoners?" demanded the sergeant in charge.

"Right over there," replied Thad, sleepily.

He had left them lying on the inside of the counter and he was on the other.

"Over phwere?" growled the officer.

Burr was wide awake now. The tone of the policeman seemed to imply a doubt about there being any prisoners, and he wanted to convince him that there were.

"Over there behind the counter," he replied, at the same time walking up to the counter and looking over behind it where he had left the men securely bound and lying on the floor, not to exceed thirty minutes before.

But he started with a shudder and a sinking of the heart when he remarked that they were no longer there.

He was dazed and mystified, for he was well aware that the men could never have left the spot without assistance, nor could they have even removed the cords which bound them.

He could not have been away from the building more than twenty minutes, if he was that, and it seemed impossible that anybody could have come up from the street, unbound the men and got away in that space of time.

But then an idea occurred to him. The fact of the two mutes remaining in the room and of the detective not having been removed from the death-chamber during all that time, seemed to indicate that their plan had been to remove him some time during the latter part of the night, that being the safest time for any kind of depredation and the time usually selected by burglars and crooks generally for their work. This being the case, it would not be unnatural to suppose that the rest of the band had arrived during the hour just preceding daylight, and had chanced to arrive at the very moment while Thad was out of the place.

Again, they might have arrived some time before, and seeing how matters stood, bided their time till he went out.

These and a half-dozen more theories flashed through his mind in the few seconds of silence during which he was blankly staring over at the deserted space where he had left the prisoners.

"Wal, phwere are they?" muttered the sergeant.

And the officer's voice brought him to a realization of his position.

"I'll be hanged if I know, sergeant," replied Thad. "They were there not more than half an hour ago."

"Ye don't m'ane to say ye left them alone?"

"Certainly. What else could I do? I was alone."

"And ye expected them to be here when when ye come back?"

"They were bound hand and foot. Certainly I expected to find them on my return."

"Oh, they were bound, then?"

"Of course. I wouldn't have left them if they had not been."

"Then they've had aid from the outside."

"There is no doubt of that, and that is what puzzles me. I wasn't away from the place to exceed twenty minutes, perhaps not so long, and they must have made quick work of it to get in here, release the men and get away so soon."

"How did you manage to capture two men all by yerself?" asked the sergeant, after some reflection.

Thad related the story in brief, and during the recital incidentally alluded to the Silent Seven.

"Oh, it was thim that ye had to deal with, was it?" said the officer.

"Yes."

"Then, it's no wonder that they gave ye the slip. There ain't a man, policeman or detective, in New York, that kin hold them fellers. I've had some experience with them myself. But the wonder to me is that you ever managed to outwit them."

It was evident by his conversation that the sergeant did not recognize the great detective, but one of his men, who had remained silent during all this time, did, and he spoke up at this point.

"Perhaps if ye knew who yez was talkin' to, sergeant, ye'd not be wondherin'," he observed. "It's a slick rogue that gets the better o' Detective Burr."

If the policeman had mentioned the superintendent himself the officer could not have shown greater surprise and awe than when the name of Burr was referred to.

He bowed profoundly and said.

"I beg your pardon, detective, but I hope I may die if I recognized you in that make-up, or I shouldn't have spoken as I did, ye may rest assured."

"I am sure of it, sergeant," laughed Burr, putting out his hand. "Here is my hand, old fellow."

"An' it's proud I am to grasp it!" cried the other. "I wonder if the bla'guards mightn't be about the place yet," he went on, by way of changing the conversation.

"It is possible, but I do not believe it," returned Thad. "However, there is no harm in trying."

With that they set to searching the room, and left no corner unsearched.

During their rounds the detective showed the officer the death-chair in which he had been twice placed and escaped by the merest luck once and by his own ingenuity the other.

"And a wicked invention it is," commented the sergeant as he looked it over. "I think as we can't find the prisoners, it will be a good job to take the machine along."

"Capital," rejoined Thad. "We will have their strongest ally when we get that."

He then took occasion to examine the chair, and discovered why it had failed to work the second time, and how the mute had remedied the fault. There was a pair of pincers—the same which he had seen the mute using while adjusting the needles—on the floor behind the chair, and from a dent in the back of the chair and a corresponding bend in the rod upon which the needles were set, it was evident that the pincers had been thrust behind the rod in such a way as to prevent it from completing its stroke, and therefore preventing the needles from passing far enough through

the small holes in the back of the chair to do any execution.

The discovery produced a profound sensation upon the detective, and he explained the matter to the sergeant.

He also related an account of the woman saving him on two different occasions.

"There's one thing sure, then, detective," remarked the officer, "ye have a friend among them."

"Yes, and it looks as though I had a couple of them. The woman interfered on the two first occasions, but this time there could be no question about it being a man."

"So much the better. If ye have two friends among them ye're all right. But let's get this chair out of here."

"Yes, that is the first consideration."

But they found it no easy matter to remove the ponderous engine of death. The sergeant had brought four men along besides himself, and the whole six, including Burr, had all they wanted to do to carry it from the building.

By the advice of Thad, there was a guard of two men placed outside the building, but far enough away from the entrance to not attract the attention of the crooks should they return, after which he returned to Police Headquarters.

He had stopped for breakfast on the way, so that it was well along in the forenoon before he reached there, and the superintendent was there.

He was already looking at the curious chair when Thad came in, and as soon as the latter made himself known to him, the superintendent said:

"Well, Thad, you've made one important capture, anyway. This solves the problem of the old farmer's death."

"Yes, and it might have solved the problem of my own, if it had not been for a little precaution on my part, coupled with some extraordinary luck."

"How was that?"

Burr related his experiences of the past twenty-four hours, which caused the chief to look extremely grave.

"I'm afraid you run too great risks, Thad, in your work," he observed. "I have always noticed that you stopped at nothing where a point was to be gained. This is commendable to a certain point, but there is a limit. No one is called upon to risk his life, except in extreme cases. I hope you won't do it again. These fellows will get you one of these days, mind what I say."

"I may have been imprudent, chief, I admit, but after all, the information I have gained by the present adventure could have been come at in no other way."

"I've no doubt of it, and your services to the city have been in this case, as in many previous ones, invaluable, but what I look at is that we are liable to lose you, and we cannot afford that for some time to come. But what have you done aside from capturing the chair?"

"Nothing practical. As I told you, I have had four of their best men under arrest since I saw you, but they all gave me the slip. I have gained some clues, however, that will, I think, prove valuable in time. I am pretty well satisfied that the man whom we spoke of, Samuel Einstein, is the head and front of the concern, and I shall bend my exertions in future toward trying to ferret him out. The mutes and the others will follow naturally."

"That may be, but I shouldn't neglect them. It is sometimes easier to catch the decoy than the game, and by catching the former the latter follows."

"That has been the principle upon which I have worked this time, but so far it has been a failure."

"No, it has not been a failure," objected the chief. "You have accomplished more than any other man has ever done, and more than I could have believed possible even with you. Go on as you have been going, or in any other way that may seem most practicable to you, and whatever the result, I shall be satisfied."

"You are very kind, chief, and I shall show my appreciation by doing my best."

After leaving the superintendent Thad went home and devoted the rest of the day to gaining a little much-needed rest, and that evening started once more upon his arduous case.

The object uppermost in his mind was to gain an entrance to the residence of the Jew, and he set his wits to work to accomplish the difficult task.

He could have taken a squad of policemen and gone to the house, and perhaps have captured the wily rascal, but he remembered what the chief had told him about working up a case against him before making an arrest. So his object in desiring to get into the house, or at least making the fellow's acquaintance, was to learn more about him. He was satisfied in his own mind that the man whom he had seen in company with Shaw and Carpenter was Einstein, but it would be necessary to procure stronger proof of the fact before resorting to extreme measures.

After pondering over the matter for some time, he at length went to his "studio," as he called the room where he did his artistic making-up, and disguised himself as a middle-aged gentleman of the Hebrew persuasion, and, providing himself with a few calling-cards with the name "Solomon Goldstein," he called at the house in Fifteenth street which he had seen the Jew come out of.

He met with disappointment the very first thing on ascending the stoop. There was a door-plate, but the name on it was "Jules Devreaux." He was in a quandary what to do for a moment. It would hardly do to ask for Einstein under the circumstances, but after a little reflection he rung the bell, and when the attendant came to the door, asked for Mr. Devreaux, and sent up his card. He was informed that Mr. Devreaux was not at home, but so persistent was he in his determination to gain his point that he inquired for Mrs. Devreaux.

Yes, she was at home, and would see the gentleman directly, and Burr was shown into the drawing-room, where he was soon after joined by the lady in question.

She proved to be a woman of remarkable beauty, and it did not require the keen eyes of the detective to see that she was as subtle as he knew the Jew to be. Another thing that impressed him was the fact that she was neither French nor Hebrew, but from appearances was an American. She was a blonde of the most pronounced order, but her eyes were extremely dark and searching.

After formally introducing himself, Thad began:

"You will doubtless be surprised, Mrs. Devreaux, when I tell you my business, but I will venture to state it at once. I spent some time in one of the South American republics a short while ago, and while there came in possession of a large number of very valuable and rare diamonds. I shall not tell you how I came in possession of them, but it will be necessary to say that I dare not offer them for sale in this city. I am extremely short of cash, however, and will dispose of the jewels at a fraction of their real value. Knowing that your husband is a man of wealth and influence, I came to him knowing that he can dispose of them or keep them, as he sees fit, without causing suspicion."

This was a bold stroke, but it was a lucky one. She looked at him for a moment with an inquiring expression, and then replied:

"They told you at the door that my husband was out, but that was because he does not wish to be disturbed. I think he will talk to you. Excuse me a moment, and I will see."

She left the room, and a few moments later a man entered. It was no other than the very Jew Thad had seen in company with the two young men little more than a week before.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALMOST THE POINT.

It was hard to imagine how a man with the Jew's nose came to adopt a French name—for Thad was satisfied he had adopted it. Every detail of it was that of a Hebrew, and that of the most pronounced type.

His only resemblance to a Frenchman was in his politeness, which was so obsequious as to be offensive.

After the first salutation, he said:

"My wife tells me dat you have some diamonds, Mr. Goldstein."

"Yes," replied the detective, "I have

some very rare and valuable jewels which I am willing to dispose of at almost any price."

"How many have you—dat is, v'at ish the value of dem?"

"There are about a hundred thousand dollars' worth."

"And how much do you want for dem?"

"Oh, I am pretty hard up, and will dispose of them for twenty thousand dollars, cash."

"Mine gracious, mine frient!" ejaculated the Jew with a wild gesture, "you certainly don't expect to get twenty thousand dollars for dem? Remember diamonds was very low yooost now, pesides, dere was de risk. I couldn't think of giving any such price."

"Oh, you shouldn't be so hard on a man in a tight place. But how much would you be willing to give?"

"Vell, let me see, if dey are very fine, v'at you claim dey are, I might be villing to give den t'ousand, but not all in gash."

"Not all in cash?"

"No, I would require you to dake part of it in someding else."

Burr thought he must be coming very near the point, and asked eagerly:

"What, for instance?"

"Vell, I can't tell you now, but it vill be good collateral. Something dat you can dispose of vithout risk. Ven I see de diamonds I vill dell you. V'ere is de diamonds?"

"They are at my hotel, the Madison House. Will you come up there and look at them, or shall I fetch them here?"

The Jew reflected a moment, meanwhile surveying the detective's face sharply, and finally replied:

"I vill go with you, provided I can go to night."

"I have no objection to your going to-night. In fact, it will suit me admirably. Shall we go now?"

The Jew reflected again and then replied:

"I vill see. Excuse me von moment."

And he left the room, and Thad heard him ascending the stairs.

The detective was delighted with the progress he was making. If he could only get the Jew into the hotel, he would induce him to make admissions that would convict him, and he would have witnesses to hear them.

Nearly half an hour passed, and at length the fellow returned and announced:

"I vill go vith you at once. I had a talk vith my wife, whom I gonsult about all my dransactions, and she adwises me to go. I am at your serwise, sir."

Thad was too eager to get the rascal into his clutches to stand upon ceremony, and they left the house at once.

As they descended the stoop, Burr noticed a woman standing on the sidewalk in front of the house, and she appeared to take great interest in one or both of them, for she stared at them until they were some distance past her.

The Jew did not appear to notice her, and did not so much as look in her direction, but after they were a few hundred feet past her, Thad glanced back and saw that she was following them, or appeared to be.

The detective's companion appeared to be in high spirits, as indeed he had been on the first night he had seen him, and chatted along gayly on various topics. They walked as far as Broadway, and then at the Jew's suggestion, they stopped and waited for a car. They had not long to wait, and the two men entered and took seats. They had no more than done so when Burr noticed a woman also taking a seat, and saw that she was the same one whom he had seen in front of the house.

He was curious to know who she was, and what object she had in following them, if indeed she was, but as she was heavily veiled, it was impossible to tell what she looked like. He had recognized her by her clothes, particularly her hat, which was of peculiar shape, and determined to keep his eye on her.

It did not take them long to reach Twenty-fourth street, where they got off and walked across to Fourth avenue. As they alighted from the car, Thad saw that the woman had also got off, and was at that moment following them again.

She took no pains to escape observation, and walked so close behind them that Burr was surprised that the Jew did not notice

her. He did not appear to do so, though, and Thad did not call his attention to her.

So closely had she dogged their steps that when they reached the Madison House she was not twenty paces behind them. The detective wondered what she would do next, and as he and his companion entered the door he glanced back and saw that she had stopped on the sidewalk not twenty feet away from the door, and seemed to be debating with herself whether she would follow them into the house or not.

It was necessary for Thad to have a few words in private with the clerk, with whom he was well-acquainted, the outcome of which was that the clerk handed him a key to a room on the second floor.

As they turned to go up-stairs Burr again glanced toward the entrance and was more astonished than ever to see that the mysterious woman had entered and was at that moment standing but a few yards away from the desk where he was.

Still the Jew took no notice of her, and the next moment the two men were climbing the stairs to the second floor.

Two other men soon followed, a fact which was also unknown to the Jew, one of whom was the clerk of the house and the other another employee, and they entered the next room to that which Thad and his companion entered.

As the detective closed the door he again glanced back, and to his surprise the woman was just putting her head above the top of the stairs. His curiosity was so aroused by this time that he could not refrain from calling the Jew's attention to the woman and asking him if he knew who she was.

The Jew glanced at her carelessly and shook his head.

"Somebody dat pelongs in de house, no doubt," he said. "She is a stranger to me."

"But she has followed us from your house," persisted Thad.

"Dat may be. She was coming dat vay, maybe, and happened to come along at se same time vith us."

Burr was satisfied now that he knew her and that her appearance had more than ordinary significance, but he pretended to accept the fellow's explanation, or pretended theory rather, and closed the door.

As he went about lighting the gas Burr's mind was busy trying to formulate a mode of procedure. When the diamond ruse had come into his head his idea had been to offer to bring them to the Jew's house, but when he found there was a chance of luring the fellow into some other place he became so eager to accomplish the fact that he neglected to provide all the details for carrying out the scheme. Therefore he was at a loss now for an excuse for not having the gems at hand.

But he was not long in solving the problem, and when he seated himself in front of the would-be purchaser, he began by saying:

"I thought it best to have a little talk about these diamonds before bringing them out of the safe down in the office, Mr. Devreaux."

"Yaas," smiled the Jew. "V'at you want to say?"

"Well, in the first place," said Thad, assuming a very serious air, "I want to know what the nature of this collateral which you propose to give me in lieu of money is."

"Oh, mine frient, you shall know dat all in goot time, and you vill fint it all satisfactory."

"That may be, but I must know in advance."

"Ven I see de diamonds, mine frient," persisted the Jew.

"No, that won't do."

"Vy von't it do? Vy are you afraid to trust me?"

"Well, since you ask me, I will tell you. Of course you know that I am a stranger in New York, and the person who first told me about you hinted that your dealings were not always what are considered square, and as I am on the same lay myself—"

"V'at you mean, sir?" interrupted the Jew angrily.

"Just what I say, that your dealings are what are called crooked, or if you want me to speak more plainly, your living is made by what is commonly called buncoing."

"You dare to dell me dis to mine face?" roared the Jew, jumping up from his seat and flourishing his hands wildly.

"Sit down, my friend," said the detective coolly. "Sit down and be calm. What is the use of making a fool of yourself? I know your reputation as well as you know it yourself, but, as I told you, I am as crooked as they make them myself, so I don't object to your society. But it is better that we should understand each other at the beginning. It is said that there is honor among thieves, and there is no reason why we should not deal squarely with each other."

The Jew resumed his seat, but it was evident that he was far from comfortable. It was apparent that he would have given a good deal to get out of his new acquaintance's company, but it was not quite convenient to do it.

He offered no further protest in words, however, and Burr continued:

"This collateral which you propose to offer me in lieu of money, as I happen to know, is gold-dust—"

The Jew started so violently that Burr was constrained to pause, but as the other did not speak, he went on:

"I say gold-dust. Perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say brass-filings or sand—"

"Sthop!" cried the Jew, jumping to his feet again. "I von't listen to v'at you say! You dell not de trut! I vill leave your room, sir!"

"Oh, no, I don't think you will," rejoined the detective as calmly as before, "especially if you consult your own best interests. What I have said is strictly true, as you know, and what is more, I have proof of it. Sit down and hear me out, and then see whether we cannot come to an understanding. You need have no fear of me, for as I have twice before stated, I am as big a rascal as you dare be."

The Jew hesitated. He wanted to fly, and yet there was a fascination about the detective's coolness or manner or something, that chained him in spite of himself.

But he did not resume his seat immediately.

"Sit down!" commanded Thad authoritatively, and the crook meekly obeyed.

He appeared to be under a spell, and could not choose but obey.

"What I wished to say," pursued Burr in the same even tone, "is that whatever dealings you have with me must be square. If I were dealing with an honest man I should not hesitate to offer and palm off, if possible, spurious diamonds for real, but as it is, I shall give you precisely what I represent, and I shall expect the same of you. What do you say?"

He hesitated and reflected for some moments, and finally put out his hand.

"I vill trust you," he said. "I vas afrait you vas a dedective at first, but I am sure I cannot be deceived in dat face. V'at I vas going to offer you vas gold-dust, dat ish a fact."

"Real or spurious?"

"Oh, real, of gourse."

"You are sure about this?"

"So helup me Moshes!"

"If it is real, why could you not as well give me the cash for my diamonds? Gold-dust is cash, and you could easily dispose of it and obtain the cash for me instead of offering me the dust."

"Vell, I wouldn't dare to offer it in dis cidy," persisted the Jew.

"Why not?"

"Because de gold-dust vas smuggled."

"Oh, that in my eye!" cried Burr impatiently. "Why do you try to trifle with me, when I tell you that I know all about your transactions? Now, I will tell you why you offered me the dust instead of the cash."

The Jew looked alarmed, but did not speak.

"The reason is very simple," pursued Thad. "It is because you have none."

"No gash?" screamed the Jew.

"No, no gold dust. At least, very little. You could not produce fifty ounces, unless you purchased it. What you intended to do, if I had agreed to take dust in lieu of cash, would have been to treat me as you are in the habit of treating the rest of your dupes—give me a few bags with a layer of gold-

dust on top and sand all the rest of the way down."

The Jew was about to jump up again, but the detective put his hand on his shoulder and restrained him.

"Keep cool," he said. "There is no need of getting excited. What I am telling you, you know to be true, and, as I said before, I have proof of the fact. Now, if you want my diamonds at the miserable figure upon which we agreed, you must pay cash. What do you say?"

The Jew was silent.

He appeared to be in a quandary what to make of the detective. He evidently believed him to be the rascal he had pictured himself, but appeared unable to understand how he had come in possession of so much knowledge regarding the Jew.

Finally he said in slow, measured tones:

"I t'ink, sir, ve vill not trade."

"Why not?"

"You haf too bad an idea of me, for von t'ing, and you vant de cash, vich I vill not gif, for anudder."

And he rose as if to go.

"I vill bid you a very good-evening," he went on, bowing profoundly.

"Stop!" cried Thad, jumping up and throwing himself between his visitor and the door. "I will not allow you to leave me like that. You came here to buy my diamonds, and you shall do it, or I will expose you to the world. You imagine that I do not know you. You think that I do not know that the name you gave me is not your real one, that your real name is Samuel Einstein, and that you carry on a nefarious business, and are guilty of murder, among other crimes! You perhaps do not know that I am acquainted with the facts concerning your murder of Harrison Higgins, the old farmer from Missouri! Now, sir, what do you say? will you trade, or not?"

The Jew appeared to have been seized with an ague.

He shook in every limb, and was as white as a sheet. His lips quivered, but he could not speak.

Staggering like a drunken man to the nearest chair, he sunk limp and powerless into it.

Thad saw that he had him at his mercy now, and followed up his advantage.

Striding up to him and standing over the quaking wretch, he continued:

"Speak, sir! Shall I proclaim you to the world and call the police to take you in hand, or will you compromise by buying my diamonds?"

"Mercy! mercy!" cried the Jew in a voice of terror. "Yes, yes, I vill buy the diamonds. Pring dem up and you shall have de monish."

"Then you confess that what I have said is true?"

Before he could reply there came a rap at the door.

Thad paused, and finally went and opened the door.

The mysterious woman stood before him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SLIPPERY CUSTOMER.

THE woman was still veiled, and stood there without speaking, while the detective gazed at her in astonishment.

A minute passed in this way, and then he broke the silence by asking:

"Whom did you want to see, ma'am?"

She made no reply, but stepping closer to the door, raised herself on tiptoe and peeped over his shoulder into the room.

Thad instinctively glanced back at the Jew, but the latter was still seated in the chair, gazing down at the floor and appeared not to notice what was going on at the door.

The woman still continued to look in, but whether she was looking at the Jew or not, Burr could not divine. She made no gesture and did not appear to try in any other manner to attract the Hebrew's attention, and Thad began to think that she was some poor demented person.

Finally he repeated his question:

"Whom do you want to see? What do you want, ma'am?"

Still no answer, and he was about to close the door in her face, when she made a sud-

den spring and shot past him into the room like a flash.

The act was so unexpected that he did not anticipate it until she was inside, and by the time he turned to see what had become of her she had reached the side of the Jew. She had fallen on her knees at his side, and was gesticulating wildly.

Not a word passed between them, and as for the Jew, he still affected not to notice her presence.

It was a strange scene, and the detective was at a loss what to make of it or what to do.

It continued for the space of five minutes, perhaps, the woman still gesticulating and the Hebrew ignoring her presence, and then he arose from his chair with the evident intention of walking away and leaving her, when she clasped him about the legs and clung to him.

All this time she had never removed her veil nor uttered so much as a sound, and Thad began to wonder whether she was not one of the mutes.

Einstein paused when she clasped his legs, and for the first time turned his eyes toward her.

He stood for a moment looking down upon her, and Burr was astonished to perceive that there was not the least indication of emotion of any kind on his face, and then he coolly spurned her aside with his foot and walked away from her.

But she was evidently not to be put off in such a way, and running after him, caught him by the arm and forcibly whirled him around.

Again he regarded her with the same placid, expressionless countenance, and not a word passed between them, but she resumed her gesticulating, and this time Thad could see that she was using some sort of deaf and dumb alphabet, but the language employed was perfectly unintelligible to him.

Once more the Jew turned from her, and was about to walk away, and again she grasped his arm, more roughly than before, and turned him completely around.

Now for the first time he showed some sign of emotion. He frowned slightly, shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly, and gave a slight wave of his hand which seemed to indicate that he wanted her to leave him, and this was quickly followed by a new set of gestures from her.

Whatever they were, they appeared to have a different effect upon him from anything she had said before, for his face showed unmistakable indications of alarm, and the further she continued the more alarmed he became.

Finally his alarm assumed the nature of real terror, and he, too, began to gesticulate.

This appeared to increase the woman's excitement, and before long the pair were going through a set of wild gyrations that resembled the actions of a couple of lunatics.

Thad was an interested spectator, and was wondering what it all meant, and what would be the outcome, when suddenly the Jew made a spring toward a stand where he had left his hat, and, grasping it, slapped it on his head, and before the detective was aware of what his intentions were, had darted from the room, closely followed by the woman.

The thing had occurred so quickly, that by the time he reached the top of the stairs in his attempt to follow and intercept the Hebrew, he was at the bottom of the stairs, and going like a race-horse, while the strange woman was keeping pace with him.

Thad now realized that if he desired to catch his man, he would have to use the utmost expedition, and started down the stairs four or five steps at a time. He was not more than a minute in reaching the street, but when he did the pair was out of sight. They seemed to have vanished as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed them.

The detective was completely mystified, and was in doubt at first whether they had really left the hotel, but a glance about the corridors convinced him that they had.

While he was still searching about, paying no heed to the people about him, the young man at the cigar counter, who had been an interested spectator of the remarkable scene, addressed Thad, whom he knew very well

when free from his disguise and had been told who the person was that had gone upstairs a few moments before.

"They gave you the slip, eh, Mr. Burr?" he remarked.

Thad looked up in surprise, for he had been so absorbed in his mission that he had forgotten that anybody in the world existed except the strange pair who had just vanished.

"Rather," was his dry response. "Did you notice which way they went, Tom?"

"Out the front door," replied the cigar man. "Didn't you catch sight of them?"

"No. They seem to have sunken into the earth or gone up into the air."

"Who were they, anyway?"

"I do not know who she is, but he is a notorious crook."

"That is what I supposed from the fact of your trying to corral him. But I've seen the dame about here more than once."

"You have?"

"Frequently—nearly every day, in fact."

"Have you any idea who she is?"

"Not the slightest."

"Did you ever hear her speak?"

"Never."

"Or see her face?"

"No."

"What does she do when she comes about?"

"Simply saunters about, as you saw her to-night, seems to be looking for some one, but speaks to nobody."

"Has anybody about the place ever spoken to her or asked what she wanted?"

"One of the call-boys asked her once who she was looking for, and she looked at him through her veil as though she would like to have him attend to his own business, and then walked away without speaking."

"Well, she's a queer one," commented Burr. "But what I would like to know is, what she has to do with this chap she went off with. Did he appear to be paying any attention to her as they went out?"

"Not a bit. He seemed to be trying to get away from her, and that is what I thought until I saw you come tearing down in their wake like a fox-hound after an anise bag."

Thad gave a brief description of her actions while in his room, and then said:

"Tom, if she shows up around here again I wish you would do me the favor to get in to conversation with her, if you can get her to talk, and find out something about her."

"But if she won't talk?"

"Then make signs," laughed the detective.

"I'm not an adept in the deaf and dumb language," laughed Tom, "but I'll do the best I can."

"I'll tell you what you can do," said Thad with a sudden inspiration.

"What's that, Mr. Burr?"

"Follow her."

"Come, now, what do you want to make out of me, a detective?" asked the other, laughing.

"Just for once. It will be an experience for you, and if you succeed in finding out where she goes I will make it worth while for you, old fellow."

"Don't mention it. But if she comes in again, I'm blessed if I don't shadow her, to satisfy my own curiosity if nothing else."

Burr was at a loss to know what move to make next after leaving the hotel, and wandered along the street in the direction of Broadway, plunged in deep thought.

At length he decided to go back to Einstein's house at a venture, and ascertain, if possible, whether he had returned or not.

It was still early, and as the night was fine, he walked the short distance he had to go.

As he approached the house, he noticed that it was still lit up as it had been when he left it, and he approached the door and rung the bell.

It was promptly answered by the same attendant he had seen before, and in answer to his inquiry, he was told that Mr. Devreaux had not yet returned.

He then resolved upon another bold stroke, and asked to see the lady.

He was again ushered into the parlor, the attendant appearing to consider him an acquaintance by this time. It was a great venture, as for aught he knew her husband had returned and told her all about his ad-

venture, but he appeared to be in for adventure lately, and sent up his card.

To his surprise and delight, the lady soon appeared, and was, if anything, more effusive in her politeness than on the former occasion.

"I did not expect this additional pleasure," she said, taking the detective's hand. "I am glad you have returned. Did not my husband come back with you?"

"He did not, madam, and I expected to find him here."

"Why, I thought you were together. You went away together?"

"Yes, but he left me at the hotel."

"Then I presume you finished your transaction, did you?"

"No, we did not, and that is why I am here again. Your husband left very abruptly, and without so much as taking leave of me."

The lady looked at him in astonishment. "Left without taking leave of you?" she repeated. "That was very strange, was it not?"

"I thought so."

"What reason do you assign for his action?"

Here was his chance, and yet he almost feared to take advantage of it. If the woman had any jealousy about her, he argued, mention of the mysterious woman in the hotel would put her in a passion with her husband, and possibly while in this state she would volunteer to divulge something about him.

"Well," he began, "we were talking about the manner in which I was to be paid for my diamonds, and I had refused to accept some gold-dust which he wanted me to take in part payment—"

"Why should you refuse the gold-dust?" she demanded, bridling.

"For the simple reason that I have no use for either brass-filings or sand."

"Brass-filings or sand? What do you mean, sir?"

"Just what I say. The stuff he wanted me to take was nothing but brass-filings and sand, with a layer of gold-dust on top, and as I say, I have no earthly use for either."

"How you know that this is true, sir?" she demanded angrily.

"First, by my actual test, and second, by his own admission."

"Do you mean to tell me that my husband admitted—or stated, rather, that what you say is so?"

"I do."

She jumped to her feet and began pacing the floor in a very pretty passion.

"The fool!" she cried. "He has taken leave of his senses! What could have induced him to do that?"

"Oh, I presume he would like to tell the truth for once to see how it went."

"What!" she screamed, flying at him with clinched fists and standing over him with glaring eyes, "you dare to say this to me, his wife?"

And she looked as though she might light into him, tooth and nail the next minute, but the detective's calmness disconcerted her somewhat.

"You would have hardly thought you were his wife, had you been there and seen what I did," he rejoined with the utmost coolness.

"What do you mean, sir?" she screamed, changing her attitude, and assuming an expression of apprehension.

"I think that was the reason he left so abruptly," he went on, disregarding her question.

"What?" she cried.

"The woman," came the cool response.

"The woman? What woman?"

She was thoroughly wrought up now, and looked as if she would like to flay somebody alive.

"That is what I would like to know—what woman," he answered in the same calm, even tone. "She was veiled so that I could not see her face, and could not tell whether she was beautiful or hideous."

"Where was she?" screeched the woman in a frenzy of rage. "How came she to meet my husband?"

"She was at the hotel, madam; but how she came to meet your husband is a matter which you will have to consult him about."

"Did he meet her by appointment?"

"That I cannot tell. The first I saw of her was when we left the house here and found her standing in front of the stoop. She followed us to the hotel, and a short time after we got into my room she came up and rapped at the door. I opened the door, not knowing who the caller might be, and found her there. As soon as she espied your husband she bounded into the room and flew to his side. Then followed a long conversation, but in a language which I did not understand, and soon afterward they went away together without so much as saying 'by your leave,' as I said."

The woman seemed to be stupefied with this horrible revelation, and stood looking at Thad as if she were unable to tell whether to believe the statement or not.

But after a while she said, and her voice had grown calm and free from anger now.

"I am constrained to believe what you say, sir, for I can think of no motive you could have for telling me an untruth, especially in this matter. Now, sir, I am going to make a proposition to you. You may think it strange, but your face impresses me as that of an honest man. First, let me ask if you think you can find out who this woman is?"

"I believe I can, madam. I will try."

"Very well. This is my proposition. If you will discover who this woman is I will take your diamonds at double the price that my husband offered, that is, twenty thousand dollars, and you shall have half the money as soon as you deliver the gems to me."

"I am sorry, madam, but I cannot accept your proposition," answered Burr solemnly.

"Why not?" she asked in great surprise.

"I will do what I can to discover the identity of the woman, but I cannot think of charging you anything for it."

CHAPTER XV.

A QUEER BARGAIN.

THE woman was overwhelmed with Burr's generous offer, and was speechless for some moments.

At length, however, she advanced toward him and putting out her hand, said:

"Give me your hand, sir. It is not often one meets such unselfish generosity in this world, and I appreciate it."

"Then I am more than paid already," replied the detective. "You could offer me no reward equal in my estimation to your good-will and appreciation."

This was a master-stroke, and it put her as much in his power as her husband had been, but in another way.

She seated herself in front of and near him, and began:

"If you do this you shall count upon me as a friend as long as you live, and if you are ever in need of anything do not hesitate to come to me."

"I thank you, and it may be that I shall need your assistance some time."

"Then come to me at once. By the way, I inferred this evening that your reason for desiring to dispose of the diamonds was because you were in need of money. Indeed, you told me as much, if I am not mistaken."

"I confess that that was my reason, madam."

"Then allow me, as a friend, remember, to offer you some assistance now. I have plenty, and will not miss a few hundred, and I am sure it will do you good."

"I thank you a thousand times, madam," replied Thad effusively, "but I have made it a rule all my life never to accept assistance from a friend, especially when that friend happened to be a lady."

"But you need it—you require it," she persisted.

"I can get along without it until such time as I dispose of my diamonds."

"Then you will accept nothing?"

"Nothing, and if you wish to consider yourself my friend, I trust you will not refer to the subject again."

"You are very unselfish, sir, and I shall be proud to call you my friend. But you said awhile ago that you would probably need my assistance some time. Why not now?"

"Because I do not need it now. Besides

the assistance I will or may need will not be of a material nature."

She looked surprised and a little alarmed. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"I may require some information which you can give if you will, and as you have already promised it, I shall expect you to keep your word, and believe you will."

She appeared still more alarmed at this strange speech.

"Information?" she said, wonderingly.

"Yes."

"In regard to my husband?"

"Perhaps. I cannot say now."

"If it is anything with regard to him, you need not ask it," she declared emphatically, "for I cannot give it."

"Then your bargain is off, as I take it?"

"Yes, if that is the condition."

"But that is not the condition. I will do my part regardless of your decision, and if you do not choose to do yours, then I shall regard your professions of gratitude as insincere."

Thad looked very much hurt as he uttered this, and she was deeply affected.

She was silent for some moments, and seemed to be struggling with her emotions.

Finally she looked up and said:

"What is the nature of the information you desire regarding my husband?"

"I cannot tell yet," he answered. "It may be with regard to this woman. If my suspicions are well founded there is a deeper significance to their going away together than either you or I imagine now."

"Do you think so?" she cried in alarm.

"I do."

She pondered a moment, and it was easily seen that she was losing her temper again.

But when she spoke, her voice had resumed its usual calmness.

"You have my word, then, that whatever comes, you shall have whatever information you want and I can give."

"Thanks. Now, let us arrange how I shall communicate with you in the event of my making any discovery."

"Yes," she rejoined eagerly. "We must arrange that."

"Let me see. You have my card, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"I am stopping at the Madison House in Fourth avenue."

"I know the place well."

"The number of my room is sixty-five. If I make any discovery worth while I will drop you a postal-card or a letter with the simple number, sixty-five, and when you receive it I will expect you to call at the hotel, and find out whether I am in or not, and if I am, come straight to my room. This will save me the trouble and you the embarrassment of my coming here, and we can talk over the matter without fear of interruption. In order to avoid publicity, you can wear a heavy veil. Does the plan meet with your approval?"

"Perfectly. The plan is an excellent one, and I shall not fail you."

"Now, there is one more thing that I would like to ask you before going."

"What is that?"

"When I spoke of the gold-dust being spurious, and that your husband so told me, you flew into a passion and said that he was a fool, that he had taken leave of his senses. What did you mean by that?"

This was so unexpected, coming as it did, that she was taken completely by surprise. She colored up, and became greatly confused, and appeared unable to find words for a reply.

"I should infer," resumed the detective, "that you were aware of the fact of the metal being spurious, and blamed your husband for his indiscretion. Am I right?"

"You are not," she retorted shortly.

"What did you mean by the assertion, then?"

"You misunderstood me. I meant that if he admitted what you said, he was a fool, because it is not true."

"You know this, do you?"

"I do."

"Have you ever seen a bag of the metal tested?"

"No, but I know that my husband would not engage in any such dishonest business."

"Then you merely have his word for it?"

"Yes, but that is sufficient."

"He tells you all his secrets, does he?"

She hesitated, and finally said:

"All of his business secrets."

"But not his love affairs?"

She hung her head and colored again, but did not reply.

"Do you not think it possible that the man who will deceive you as I know he has done to-night would also deceive you in some other matters?"

"Possibly. But I must know more of this affair before I condemn my husband," she replied.

"Very commendable, and I would never have given you this unwelcome information had I not known that the man is unworthy of you and is deceiving you in more ways than one."

"The information, although unpleasant, was not unwelcome, sir, as I have given you reason to know, and I thank you for it."

Burr considered that he had gained a good point, and soon after took his leave.

With this woman on his side, he thought, it would only be a matter of a very short time when he would run the arch villain to earth, and he left the place in a very comfortable frame of mind.

He kept a keen lookout as he went along for the Jew, but saw nothing of him, although he walked as far as Broadway.

It was not far from midnight by this time, and yet he was anxious to know whether the mysterious woman had put in an appearance at the Madison House, and turned his steps in that direction once more.

He was about half-way between Broadway and Fourth avenue when his attention was attracted by some one walking at a brisk pace behind him, and turning, was surprised to see that it was Tom, the cigar clerk of the hotel.

He hastened to catch up with the detective, and as soon as he did the clerk commenced:

"I've had my adventure, Mr. Burr."

"What?" inquired Thad, not comprehending what he meant.

"The woman," rejoined the other. "She showed up again at the hotel, and I followed her."

"Was the man with her?"

"No, she was alone."

"You saw nothing of him, eh?"

"No."

"Well, what of the adventure?"

"Well, she came sauntering around as usual, and as soon as I got sight of her I made a break for her. She was standing near the door staring about as if she were looking for some one, as she always does, and I braced up to her highness and asked her who she was looking for. She turned her face toward me, and I suppose she was looking at me, but I couldn't tell exactly, as she had that cussed veil on as usual, but made no reply."

"I wasn't to be put out by anything like that, and repeated the question. Still she didn't say anything, and after a little turned to go. 'What's eating you?' I demanded."

"Can't you talk, or were you always that way?" But she mosied right along as though I hadn't said a word. Say, I believe she's as deaf as a post, or else off up here," he went on, touching his forehead.

"I believe the latter is the case," observed Thad. "But tell me about your adventure."

"It wasn't much. As I said, she mosied right along as though she had a string to her and somebody was pulling it hard, and I put one of the boys in charge of the counter, and started in pursuit. She kept right on down Fourth avenue after leaving the hotel till she got to Fifteenth street and then turned toward East River."

"I poled right along after her like a hound after a piece of liver and she didn't seem to see me, or if she did, didn't care a rap."

"I soon saw she was taking me into the wilds."

"The wilds?" interrupted Thad.

"Yes, the lower regions, in other words, among the slums, but I thought I could stand it if she could, and chased along."

"Well, sir, she kept up her gait till she struck Avenue D. If she didn't, I'm a tetotler."

"Well?"

"When she struck this elegant thoroughfare she turned up town a bit, but did not go far before she dived into a hole in the wall, and disappeared like a shot."

"Didn't you see where she went?"

"Sure. She went into the doorway of a delightfully perfumed tenement, and soon began to climb stairs."

"Did you follow her up?"

"That's right, but it was no go."

"How so?"

"I was met on the stairs by a duffer who stood in my way as though he didn't want me to go any further. I remarked that it was a lovely evening and asked him if it wouldn't be as convenient for him to try standing on one side or the other. I hinted that I didn't care particularly which side he stood on, but would be under a thousand obligations to him if he would choose one side or the other instead of the middle, but he didn't take the hint worth a cent."

"Then I hinted that he was wanting in the instincts of a gentleman, but he refused to be insulted, and never chirruped. Then I got mad and said things, but still he spared his breath for better work, and I saw it was no use trying to pick a quarrel in that way, so I imitated his own style of conversation, and tried to push by."

"Then did he say anything?"

"Not a whimper, but he expressed himself in a manner which even I could not fail to understand."

"How was that?"

"Why, he let fly with the hardest and heaviest fist I ever ran up against and I went down stairs."

"Walk down?" laughed Burr.

"No, I was in too big a hurry for that."

"Was that the end of your adventure?"

"Yes, that was all of it."

"Well, you discovered something, anyway, and are entitled to a reward, which you shall have. But I can tell you something about the people you had to deal with and why the man and the woman too, for that matter, did not speak to you."

"How is it, and who are they?"

"Deaf mutes, every one of them."

"You don't say?"

"Yes, there are seven of them, but whether there are seven men and one woman or only six men and the woman, I have been unable to find out."

"If you knew who this woman was, why did you have me trailing away down there after her?"

"When I saw her here I did not know who she was. That is, I did not know it was the same woman I had seen down there, and that is why I asked you to shadow her. I understand now why she came into my room and had the scene with the Jew."

"How was it?"

"She was putting him on to me and no doubt warning him to make his escape while he had a chance. But why she went through all the maneuvers of getting down on the floor on her knees and all that, and why he affected not to notice her, and finally spurned her, is a mystery I will have to unravel later."

"Probably she is in love with him."

"Possibly, but if she is, she had better look out for herself, as the old Jew's wife knows about her actions, and swears vengeance against her and the husband too, if she finds out that what I told her is true."

"You told her, then?"

"Certainly."

"Want to create a row in the family?"

"Yes, if it will lead, as I hope it will, to the Jew's wife divulging his secrets."

"Ah, that is the lay, eh?"

"That's the game."

"You detectives are a game set," laughed Tom.

As it was pretty late by this time and the detective had had very little sleep for a good many hours, he decided to stop in the house.

And it was lucky he did, and came very nearly being unlucky.

He retired immediately upon going to his room, and was soon oblivious to all around him.

How long he had slept, he did not know, but he imagined that he had scarcely dropped off, when he was awakened by what appeared to be some one walking across the floor of his room.

CHAPTER XVI.
MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

THAD WAS not sure that he had heard aright, and thought it might be the fag end of a dream he had been having in regard to the mutes, and which was probably superinduced by Tom's account of his adventure, and so he listened again.

No, there could be no mistake about it. There was the sound of footsteps stealing softly across the carpet from the direction of the door, as well as he could make out, toward the bed.

What could it mean? He had locked the door on entering the room, and he did not see how it was possible for any one to get in.

But there he was, and there could be no mistake about it.

All this flashed through his mind in the fraction of a second, and then he was ready for business.

Rising to a half-sitting posture, he prepared to spring as soon as his mysterious visitor should be within reach. But just then, whether the intruder had discerned his action in the darkness or not, he stopped, and the dim light from the window showed his outline as he stood there, apparently gazing at the detective, although he must have had the eyes of a cat to have seen him in that gloom.

A half a minute, perhaps, passed, and then Burr decided to act, or rather speak.

"What do you want?" he asked in a cool, firm voice.

No answer.

"Who are you, and what do you want here?" he repeated in a more emphatic tone. Still no reply.

Thad considered it time to act, and without any more ceremony, made a sudden spring out of bed, and calculating upon the position of his visitor, aimed to clutch him by the throat.

But if the fellow was wanting in the power of speech, he certainly was not in action, and glided aside in time to avoid the grasp.

The detective was thoroughly aroused now and followed the apparition up with all the agility he possessed, but it was no use. It seemed to elude him like a shadow. He knew it was no illusion, for as he chased it about the room he could hear its feet shuffling over the carpet.

Finally, exhausted and disgusted, he called out:

"Stop, or I shall fire!"

There was no answer, and the figure continued to glide away from him when he approached it, and stop when he stopped.

"Stop, I say, or I shall shoot!" he repeated. But still there was no response, and again the figure glided away.

His threats of shooting had been meaningless thus far, for he had no weapon in his hand, but now he concluded it was time to act in earnest, and returning to the side of the bed, took his revolver from under the pillow, and then turned upon his unknown visitor. But now he could no longer locate him.

Thad listened, but there was no longer any sound of footsteps, nor were the dim outlines which he had before discerned visible.

He moved swiftly toward the door, and reached it without encountering any object, and then he found something to increase his surprise.

The door was standing about half open.

Thad decided the matter of the apparition being a bit of imagination. There had undoubtedly been some one of real flesh and blood in the room. He now opened the door a little wider and peered out into the hall, which was dimly lighted, but still light enough to discern objects with readiness, and could see no one moving about. Nor could he hear footsteps as of any one retreating. But when he ran to the top of the stairs some one was just reaching the last few steps, and soon vanished.

Returning to his room, the detective lit the gas and, after making a thorough search of the room, to make sure that the person was not still concealed there, he hastily slipped on his clothing and went down to the office.

The night-clerk and a couple of call-boys slept peacefully in their seats, and everything was as quiet as the grave.

Waking the clerk, Thad asked:

"Has anybody gone out of here within the last ten minutes?"

"Yes, somebody came down and went out a few minutes ago," replied the clerk sleepily. "Don't know exactly how long ago."

"Did you notice who it was?"

"No."

"What was he like?"

"Dunno. Didn't look at him."

"Well, whoever it was," observed Burr sternly, "he was in my room!"

"Then you ought to know who he is," muttered the sleepy clerk. "Always know my room-mate, or they don't stay, that's all."

"This was no room-mate. He forced his way into the room, and was in all probability, a burglar. I should think you would see that people coming in and going out at this time of night belonged in the house or not allow them to go up stairs."

"Thasso, oughto," muttered the clerk, and went to sleep again.

Thad saw there was nothing to be gained by remaining here, and returned to his room. He was more careful about locking his door this time, but he was too much agitated over the affair of the unknown person entering his room to permit of sleep that night, and he lay awake thinking the remainder of the time between that and morning.

He fell into a deep sleep after daylight, however, and slept until nearly noon, when he arose greatly refreshed.

Burr's first work after breakfast was to write the number 65 on a postal card and direct it to Mrs. Jules Devreaux, and then leaving word at the office that if any one called for him to say that he would be back by two o'clock, went out:

He went directly to Police Headquarters to ascertain whether any arrest had been made by the police left to watch the Grand street place, and was informed that there had not. The police had seen no one of a suspicious character enter the place, they said, but this went for little in Thad's estimation. There were tenants on four floors besides the one occupied by the crooks, and and as the latter were as frequently disguised as otherwise, they might have gone and come a dozen times and the police would have been none the wiser.

So he decided to pay the place a visit himself.

In order to do this, it was necessary to assume a different disguise, and he went home and made himself up as a countryman; but of a different type from what he had represented before. This time he was made up as a country merchant of the New England type.

Returning to the Grand street place, he was about to enter the street door, when the two policemen on guard across the street came over and asked him where he was going.

"I'm goin' up to see a man," he replied with an innocent air.

"What man?" asked the officer.

"Mr. Einstein, I think his name is."

"Ah, I see," said the policeman winking at his mate. "You've been having some correspondence with him, I suppose?"

"Why, yes, I hev. How did you know about it?" he cried with a surprised look.

"Oh, we have a way of knowing these things," rejoined the officer with a knowing air.

"Dew tell!" exclaimed the country merchant, still more surprised. "Yew fellers must be powerful cute."

"Fairly so. But you won't go up there, you know!"

"I won't?"

"That's what I said."

"Why not?"

"I'm not here to answer questions," retorted the policeman roughly. "I said you wouldn't go up. Ain't that enough?"

"Not much. I'd like tew know who's a-goin' to hinder me," growled the Yankee, pretending to get angry.

"Well, there's no good talkin' to youse," muttered the cop. "Ye'll come along with us, that's all!"

And he grasped Thad by the shoulder roughly.

"Where to?" demanded the detective, affecting to be terribly frightened.

"We'll show you."

"Am I arrested?"

"That's about the size of it."

Thad burst out laughing, and displayed his badge.

"That's one on you, Donnelly!" he smiled.

The policeman stepped back and stared at him as though he had been a monster.

"Why—why, who the deuce are youse?" he gasped.

Burr whispered something in his ear, and the officer turned red and tried to laugh, but it was a failure.

"Youse are too slick, Mr. Burr," he growled, and turning upon his heel, swaggered back to his post.

Thad then went on up-stairs. On trying the door of the crooks' hang-out, he found it unlocked, and went in.

Things were just as he had left them on his former visit, and it was quite evident that none of the gang had been there since.

"We've given them a scare, anyway," he mused, "if we have done no more. But that is a long way from capturing the game."

After giving the place a thorough search for new evidence and finding none, he returned to the street.

He then went back home and resumed his former disguise—that of a Hebrew, and returned to the Madison House. It was not quite two when he got back to the hotel, and nobody had called for him thus far, and he went to his room.

Two o'clock came and passed, and still no one came. Three o'clock had just struck, and he was on the point of giving his expected visitor up, when there came a rap at the door.

It was with a great deal of eagerness that he opened the door, and to his great satisfaction, a woman, closely veiled, stood before him.

"How do you do, Mrs. Devreaux!" he exclaimed cordially, extending his hand.

But to his surprise, she neither answered nor put out her hand.

She raised herself on her tip-toes and peered over his shoulder into the room, and then turning about glided away as rapidly as her limbs would carry her.

Thad was too much astonished to follow her at once, and it was a full minute before he realized that she was the same woman who had called on the previous day, otherwise, the deaf mute, and then he did not consider it worth while to follow her.

He was still standing there gazing in the direction she had gone, when Tom, the cigar clerk, came bounding up the stairs, out of breath.

"Did you see her?" he gasped, as soon as he could catch his breath.

"Yes, I saw her," replied Thad.

"Did she come up here?"

"Yes."

"What did she do?"

"Rapped at the door, peeped into the room, and then scooted."

"I guess she's looking for the old man."

"I guess so, but she's coming to a poor place. He'll never put in an appearance here again."

"No. We know where she belongs now, and it is not worth while to bother with her. I would have followed her myself only for that."

"But don't you think it would be a good scheme to arrest her and find out what she knows?"

"Possibly. I think of doing so later, but I am not quite ready for that yet. By the way, the police did arrest her once, and when she was taken before the police judge he decided that she was a harmless imbecile."

"That's what I think. She—"

But he paused. He had been attracted by the sound of some one ascending the stairs, and turned to see who it was.

The next instant he turned to the detective again and whispered excitedly:

"There she is again. I guess she wasn't satisfied with her last visit, and thinks the old man's concealed inside. I'll skip."

And away he went, but he gave the woman a searching stare as he passed her, but it was no use. Her veil precluded a sight of her face.

Meanwhile the woman came on up, and the detective watched her movements with interest.

Arriving at the top of the stairs, she walked rapidly up to Thad and put out her hand.

He was a little surprised, but took the hand, which he found to be neatly gloved, and was still more astonished the next instant to hear her say:

"Good afternoon, Mr. Goldstein! Have I kept you waiting long?"

Then he recognized her. It was Mrs. Devreaux.

He could not refrain from smiling as he said:

"I was about mistaking you for another woman, Mrs. Devreaux, but I am glad that I was mistaken. Come in."

"Another woman?" she exclaimed in a tone of surprise, walking into the room.

"Yes—"

"Not the—?"

"Yes," he interrupted, "the woman. She was here not five minutes ago, and the clerk had just come up to ask me if I had seen her, and when you came, we both mistook you for her, coming back."

"You did not see her then?" she said, sinking into a seat and raising her veil.

"Yes. She came to my door and rapped, but when I spoke to her, mistaking her for yourself, she turned and vanished like a shadow."

"I wonder who the creature can be and what she wants."

"I cannot imagine what she wants, but I have already discovered who she is."

"You have?" she exclaimed with great animation.

"Yes, she is one of a lot of deaf mutes whom your husband employs in some way."

"My husband employs?"

"Yes."

"For what purpose?"

"That I am unable to explain, but I know he has something to do with them. Has he never told you anything about them?"

"Never," she replied stoutly, "and I do not believe he employs them."

"Pardon me, but I happen to know that he does."

"How do you know?"

"I have seen him in their company and at their place, and I have also heard him tell one of his other men that they would get the Silent Seven, as he calls them, to do certain things."

"What things?" she cried eagerly.

"It would shock you if I should tell you."

"No, I am ready to hear anything now, and to believe almost anything. Tell me, do."

"Well, if you insist."

And he related as briefly as possible, his various adventures with the mutes, not omitting a graphic account of her husband's actions and his connection with the affairs.

She was greatly affected by the recital, and sat mute and dejected for a long time, apparently struggling with her conflicting faith in her husband and doubt.

Suddenly she appeared to have an inspiration and, looking at the detective, said:

"You are a detective, are you not?" And without waiting for his answer, went on: "I know you are. You need not tell me."

CHAPTER XVII.

A LUCKY DISCOVERY.

THAD was not surprised that this keen woman should suspect, after what had passed, that he was a detective, and he did not care much at this status of the game if she did know it.

He had gained information enough to satisfy his own mind that her husband was the individual he was after, and his only object now, so far as she was concerned, was to discover whether she was a party to his villainies, and if not, to enlist her on his side.

So far her faith in her husband was too strong to expect this, but he hoped to break this down in time, provided she was as innocent as she had left him to believe up to this time.

Only once had she betrayed herself, and that was when she spoke of the gold-dust, and even then, after her explanation, Thad was inclined to believe that she had told the truth when she averred that she believed the dust genuine.

He smiled, therefore, at her question, and replied:

"What makes you think so, Mrs. Devreaux?"

"I have every reason to believe it," she rejoined. "In the first place, your anxiety to learn something about the private affairs of my husband would be sufficient in itself to arouse my suspicions, but in addition to that was your refusal to accept compensation for what you were about to do for me, and lastly, your extraordinary knowledge of matters which certainly could not interest a private individual."

"Might I not be doing this for pastime?"

"If you were rich, possibly. But, being poor, you could not afford anything of the kind."

"You make a mistake in the last assumption, madam. I am not poor. On the contrary, I am rich."

"Why, then, did you want to dispose of your diamonds at so low a rate?"

"For the purpose of making your husband's acquaintance and yours, madam."

"What was your object in desiring to make our acquaintance?"

"For the same reason that anybody wants to make pleasant acquaintances."

"But you had another motive."

"Yes, to tell you the truth, I had."

"What was it?"

"If I tell you, you will be angry, besides, you will not believe me, most likely."

"No, I promise not to be angry, and I will believe as much of what you tell me as I can."

"Well, then, my desire to make your acquaintance was because I knew your husband to be one of the most unmitigated scoundrels and murderers in the country—"

She sprung to her feet and glared at the detective as she had the night he made the first disclosures to her.

"Sit down, please," he went on in a calm voice. "I told you you would be angry, but if you will hear me out I will prove every word I say."

"No, I cannot listen to what you say. It is awful, besides it is not true."

"As I told you, I will prove all I say, in which case, you have no right to uphold him, and if I cannot, then you will have the more reason for your faith in him. But another and as great a reason for wanting to make your acquaintance was to find out whether you were privy to his villainy or not. I have been informed that you were, but I do not, cannot believe it. Your face does not indicate it, your words and actions do not shadow it."

She had by this time resumed her seat, and was watching the detective with the curiosity of a child. She appeared unable to make out what manner of man he was, anyway.

"As part proof of what I have asserted about your husband, be good enough to read that letter," he pursued, handing her the letter written to the Missouri farmer. "That will give you an inkling of what his business is like, and then I will proceed to show you the kind of people he herds with. Perhaps you wonder why he did not return home last night?"

This was the merest venture, for aught the detective knew her husband had returned home, but as fortune would have it, he hit it just right.

She stared at him with more wonder than ever.

"Why, how did you know he did not return home last night?" she asked.

"I know all his movements, madam."

"You do?"

"As well as he does himself, and much better than you his wife, do."

"I am satisfied of that. He did not come last night, and had not returned when I left. It was on that account that I was so late in coming here. I wanted to see him before I came away."

"You need not be surprised if he does not return to-night, madam. But read the letter, please."

She turned her attention to the letter, and as she read Thad could see that it was having a profound effect upon her.

Finally she finished it and looked up, and he saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"Where did you get this letter?" she inquired.

"From the man to whom it is addressed."

"Where is he now?"

"Dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes."

"You do not mean to say that—"

"Yes, by your husband's hands, or what is the same thing, the hands of his hirelings."

"How do you know this?"

"In the first place, it was found that he was missing. The last that had been seen of him he was with a couple of men whom your husband employs to do his work. I suspected foul play, and traced the matter up, and found the body in a tenement-house in Avenue D. I recovered it and found the man had been killed by some sort of instrument which left a series of minute wounds, like the prick of a needle, along his spinal column, and I afterwards found the instrument, or machine rather, which executed the horrible deed."

"Where did you find the machine?"

"In the place on Grand street mentioned in the letter."

The woman shuddered.

"My husband's office!" she gasped.

"Exactly. So you were aware that his real name was not Devreaux, weren't you?"

"Certainly not. His name is Einstein," she replied quickly.

"The other one is assumed, then?"

She was silent for some moments, and dropped her eyes to the floor, but presently she raised them to the detective's face and said:

"Yes, Devreaux is assumed. At least I presume it is; although I never knew that he had gone by that name."

"For what purpose?"

"I cannot tell. I must first know that he has assumed my brother-in-law's name before I can answer such a question."

"Did your husband ever give you to understand what his business is?"

"Not exactly. I know he is a broker of some kind, but I never took the trouble to find out exactly what. He always provided me with plenty of money, and I was satisfied."

"You never suspected that he was obtaining the money he gave you by luring poor unsuspecting countrymen into his place and not only robbing them, but in many cases, killing them?"

"Horrors! no! If I had, I should not have touched a penny of the money."

"Well, now that you know it, will you use the money?"

"I do not know it yet."

"Then I will convince you, both of that and of the fact of his connection with these murderous mutes."

"How?"

"I will take you to the place, where I have no doubt we shall have an opportunity of seeing him."

"I care not so much about that as I do about this woman. What do you imagine his relations with her are?"

"In my honest opinion, she is merely a tool for carrying out his projects the same as the others, but she evidently thinks a great deal of him."

"You do not think he cares for her, then?"

"I do not imagine so."

"But you do not know positively?"

"No."

"You say you will take me to the place. Where is it?"

"In a flat in Avenue D."

"A low place?"

"The neighborhood is bad, but the flat is merely the residence of the seven or eight deaf mutes I spoke of. Will you go?"

"Yes. When shall we start?"

"It will be better for us to wait till after dark. There is not so much danger of being seen by any one whom you care for."

"Oh, as to that, I shall go so heavily veiled that no one would recognize me anyway."

"Will you meet me here?"

"If you like."

"That will do."

She arose to go, when Thad said:

"By the way, do you know any one in your husband's employ?"

"I do not," she replied.

"I did not know but you might have met

a couple of young men by the name of Carpenter and Shaw."

"I have never heard of them."

"Your husband was not in the habit of bringing any of his people to the house, then?"

"Never. If they wanted him, they called at the door, but never got any further. That is one thing I have to commend him for, above everything else, he never brought any of his business into the house, and was never known to speak of it at home."

She then took her leave.

Burr was more fully convinced now than ever that this woman had no guilty knowledge of her husband's crimes, and believed that as soon as he could convince her that he was the kind of man he was, she would help him to convict him.

At about eight o'clock she got back to the hotel and called for the detective.

She had attired herself in a coarse outing garment covered with a waterproof, and her face was hidden by a thick veil that concealed every lineament of her features.

"I see you are prepared for a slumming expedition," laughed Thad, as they left the hotel.

"Yes, I wanted to be prepared for any kind of adventure."

The night was propitious for this sort of adventure, being dark and cloudy, and although it was not raining when they set out, it looked as if it might pour any minute.

Taking a cab they were driven to Avenue D, a block or so from the flat house, to avoid attracting the residents of the neighborhood.

Here they alighted and went the rest of the way on foot.

By the time they reached the place the rain began to come down in a fine mist, which was a most fortunate circumstance, as it drove the dwellers of the various tenements indoors and saved our friends the pain of being ogled by them.

Instead of going up the steps he had on the occasion of the previous visit, Burr decided to take the others, at a venture, as there were never so many people on the stairs.

When they reached the fourth floor, Thad put his ear to the door and listened. It was all quiet within, and, taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he adjusted one in the lock. He was compelled to try several before he found one that would fit, but he finally succeeded, and turning it, opened the door and was about to step in, when his companion touched his arm and said in a whisper:

"Do you know where you are going?"

"Yes," he replied, "I have a pretty good idea."

"Might not there be somebody in there?"

"There might, and for that reason you had better remain here until I reconnoiter."

He then opened the door and stepped inside, leaving the door ajar. The hall was totally dark, and the woman crouched close to the wall in mortal dread as soon as the detective had left her.

Meanwhile he had proceeded into the room, which was also in darkness, walking as noiselessly as possible.

He was not satisfied this time with searching the front room, but went through the back ones as well. But he found no one on the premises, and returned to the front room again.

He then put his head close to the panel which he had used on a previous occasion, and knew that it was the back of the closet in the next room, and listened.

There was no sound of talking, but by listening attentively he caught the sound of shuffling feet and another sound which he could not define—a sort of thumping at intervals. But even this became clear to him after a little, and he recognized it as the slapping of cards on a table, accompanied by the rap of the player's knuckles, and he knew that some persons were playing cards in the next room.

He next tried the panel, and found that he could move it aside. This admitted him into the closet, and as the doors were closed, he could stand in there and hear all that was going on, and by pushing them a little ajar, he could see into the room.

Having satisfied himself on this point, he pushed the doors the fraction of an inch open and peeped in.

Six of the mutes were seated about a long

table, some of them eating and drinking and others playing cards. The Jew and the woman were both absent.

Nevertheless Thad returned to the hall and brought Mrs. Devreaux in. She stepped timidly into the closet and peeped through the partially open door, and instantly turned and looked inquiringly at the detective.

He understood her meaning and said:

"No, they are not there, but this is the gang of mutes of which I spoke."

"But why do you say my husband has anything to do with them?" she whispered pettishly.

"Because, as I told you, I have seen him with them and heard him speak of them as his servants."

"Well, you may be right," she remarked in a skeptical voice, "but I would rather see it myself."

Meanwhile she kept her eyes glued to the crack, and a look of the utmost contempt overspread her face as she watched the villainous faces one after another, and saw them conversing in their unintelligible language.

"They are not a pretty lot, are they?" observed Thad at length, as he watched the workings of her features.

"The most wretched lot I ever beheld!" she cried with a contemptuous curl of the lip, "and that is why I cannot believe my husband—"

She paused, and her features underwent a wonderful change. And no wonder. The door on the other side of the room had just opened and her husband had entered, and was followed a moment later by the mysterious veiled woman!

CHAPTER XVIII.

SWORN ALLIES.

MRS. DEVREAUX's eyes were fixed for an instant upon the face of her husband, and then turned to the woman.

The latter was heavily veiled when she came in, but she soon threw it aside, and Burr's companion watched eagerly to see what she looked like as did also the detective, and they were both soon satisfied, and the woman turned to him and whispered:

"Isn't she a fright?"

"She is not hurt with beauty, I must say," replied Thad.

Nor was she. She was the same woman who had released him when he was confined in the closet, and he had remarked then that she was not beautiful.

She was about forty years old, and the dissolute life she had led had rendered her face almost repulsive, with its bleary eyes, purple nose and blotched cheeks.

"I wonder what the man can see in that creature to admire?" whispered his wife.

"She is perfectly hideous."

"It is not at all likely that he does admire her," rejoined Burr. "But she may be subtle and serve his purpose in this nefarious business. She looks as though she might possess some cunning."

Mrs. Devreaux turned away.

"Come," she said, "I've seen enough."

"Are you satisfied?" smiled Thad.

"Fully. Let us get out of here."

She led the way out, but paused when she reached the other room for her companion to take her arm.

Not a word passed between them till they reached the street and then she muttered, as a shudder ran over her:

"I am so glad to be out of that horrible place. And to think that my husband should remain there!"

"He doubtless has business," observed the detective. "I shouldn't wonder if they were about to concoct some new crime."

"Then you should go back and watch them."

"Not until I see you safe on your way."

"The cab will be waiting for us. I can take that and go home, and let you go back."

"It is very considerate of you, but I think I had better see you as far as Broadway."

"It will not be necessary; in fact, I would rather be alone after what I have seen."

"You are willing to accept my story now, are you?"

"Every word of it, and that is one reason I want you to go back. I want you to arrest that reptile! I never wish to see him again."

"Very well, I will go back, but I cannot promise to arrest him, as there are too many for me. But I will send a call to Headquarters for assistance, and if it arrives in time, I will try to capture the whole lot."

"Do, if possible. And now, before I leave you, let me pledge myself as your ally. If I can do anything to assist you in this matter, I shall be only too glad to do it."

"I shall appreciate your aid, and may call upon you very soon. If he returns home, do not pretend that you have seen what you have to-night, and try to worm all you can out of him. Let him know, little by little that you are in possession of the secret of his crimes, and finally show him this letter," pursued the detective, handing her the epistle he had picked up in the street. "Do not let him get possession of it, and return it to me."

"Trust me," she said earnestly, taking his hand. "I will convict him if there is a way to do it. Good-by."

"Good-by. When shall I see you again?"

"Any time you say. You had better not come to the house, but if you wish to see me, drop me the same signal you did before and I will come to the hotel."

"Very well. Good-by."

She entered the carriage, and after it had driven away Burr returned to the flat house. As he was about to enter the doorway which he had done before he noticed two men going in at the other door, and recognized them as Carpenter and Shaw.

He hastened up-stairs on the other side, and just as he peeped out of the closet doors again they came into the room where the mutes and the Jew were assembled.

"Ah, my tear frients!" cried the Jew, jumping up from his seat to greet them. "I s'posh you received my note?"

"Yes," replied Shaw, the tall man. "What is the game to-night?"

"Dere is big game to-night, mine poys."

"What is it?" muttered Shaw, who appeared to be put out about something.

"You remember the young man I told you about?"

"The wealthy young Californian?"

"De same."

"Well, what about him?"

"He ish here. Shoost arrived this afternoon, and is at the Stuydevant House. He ish sick—in the lasht stages of consumption. I have seen him and got the matter fixed up. He ish anxious to make the investment and vill go vith us anyvere."

"What do you propose to do with him, now that they have got our chair?"

"I haf anoder plan, vich vill be a petter von. De bolice vill not be so apt to discover it. Dey vill be on de lookout for de oder t'ing now, and ve must abandon it for de present."

"What is your new plan?"

Instead of replying aloud, he beckoned the young men, one at a time to him, and whispered something in their ears. As he did so, he gave vent to a chuckle of satisfaction in each instance, but the plan, whatever it was, did not appear to impress them as anything very amusing, for each of them shuddered, and Shaw exclaimed:

"Let you alone for something fiendish. Satan himself couldn't hold a candle to you for villainy!"

"Oh, mine frient!" cried the Jew, with another chuckle, "v'y do you say dat? You all know dat I am de most tender-hearted shendleman in New York."

"Yes, when the others are all away. But look here, Einstein, there has got to be a more liberal divide this time. We are tired of doing your dirty work and getting nothing, while you remain out of sight and roll in wealth!"

"Oh, mine frient!" deprecated the Jew with a hurt tone, "how can you be so un-kint? You know I am de mosht liberal man in de world."

"Yes, to yourself. In that last transaction, there was a matter of ten thousand dollars, and what did we get out of it?"

"Blenty, not isht?"

"Plenty? Five hundred apiece!"

"Vell, v'ot you vant, de eart'?"

"No, but we want a liberal divide. Five hundred dollars is nothing to risk your neck for. Suppose we had been caught?"

"Oh, ve all haf to run our chances in dis peesness."

"I take notice you run no chances. When the pinch comes, you are out of the way, and we have to bear the brunt."

"But look at de expense! I haf to bear all dat."

"That amounts to very little, compared with what we are constantly risking. What is the divide to be this time?"

"Vell, let me see. De young man has about fifty t'ousant vich he is villing to invest. How vill two t'ousand apiece do?"

"It won't do."

"Come, don't be hard on me, mine poys," grumbled the old villain. "You know you wouldn't haf anyt'ing if it vas not for me. V'at you t'ink vas right?"

"Not a cent less than ten thousand apiece!"

"Oh, mine gracious!" cried the Jew, holding up both hands and making a pitiful face. "You vant to ruin me entirely. Ten t'ousant! Gracious Moshes! dat vas a fortune! How vill six t'ousand do?"

"It won't do. Ten thousand is our figure. If you don't want to give that, we are out of it."

Einstein threw himself back in his chair and gazed at the two men for a minute or two with a bland smile, and then gave vent to a low chuckle.

There was a strange change came over the men's faces immediately.

It was apparent that they understood its meaning, for they looked alarmed, and the longer he regarded them the more completely did they appear to lose their power of resistance and fall into his.

At length he spoke, and at the first word both men trembled as though it had been the executioner pronouncing their death-warrant.

"You vill be oudt of it, eh?" he said, in low, impressive tones. "You vill desert me, eh? You threaten me, eh? Vell, I like dat! Dis vas fine language from you. Look here!" he went on with sudden energy, jumping to his feet, "I offered you six t'ousant just now, did I not?"

"Yes," replied Shaw, meekly.

"Vell, I take dat back. I give you shoost one t'ousand dollars! You hear? One t'ousand dollars! You get no more. Vill you do de vork or not?"

The young men hung their heads, and finally answered in the meekest of voices:

"Yes, sir."

"I thought so," observed the Jew with a bland smile, and resumed his seat.

The young men were completely cowed, and Thad wondered what could be the secret of this man's power over those in his employ.

"Now," resumed the Jew, in a more cheerful tone, "I vill give you your instructions, and I vant dem carried out to de letter, you understand?"

"Yes," was the humble response of both men.

"They had better be, you know. De young man ish at de Stuydevant House, room 43, on de fourt' floor. His name ish Herbert P. Morton. You got dat?"

"Yes, sir," replied Shaw, who had taken out a note-book and was putting down the instructions.

"Fery vell. You go dere immediately and take him to the foot of Fulton street. Not at de ferry, remember, but at de pier shoost above. Dere vill pe a poat dere vaiting for you. Take your young man aboard, and you vill be rowed over to a point nearly opposite Governor's Island, in Puttermilk Channel, and dere landed. It is a quviet blace, and dere vill pe no dancher of interruption. You know den v'at to do. You got all dat?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Fery vell. Now go, and see dat de t'ing is done so dat dere vill pe no traces for de bolice und t'e detectives to follow up do-morrow!"

"Yes, sir," replied Shaw, in the same humble tone.

"Dat ish all. Goot-night, mine frients."

And rising from his seat, he shook them as heartily by the hands as if there had been no misunderstanding.

The young men started to leave the room, and the Jew proceeded to instruct the mutes in their part of the work, but Burr did not wait to see what it was. He had two reasons for this. First, he had business at the

Sturtevant House which required his immediate attention; and second, because he could not have understood a word of it anyway, as it was given in the unintelligible language peculiar to the gang.

Hurrying out of the place, he was lucky enough to reach the street ahead of the young men, who came out of the other door when he was a hundred feet away.

But they had one decided advantage over him. They had kept their carriage standing at the curb waiting for them, while he was compelled to walk until he could find one.

And to make matters worse, he did not find a cab until he had gone nearly two blocks. But he gave the driver an extra tip, and asked him to take him to the corner of Twenty-eighth street as quickly as it was possible to drive.

The cabby promised to do so, and rolled away.

A very few minutes later the cab pulled up in front of the hotel, and the detective jumped out.

Glancing about, he was gratified to see that the other vehicle had not yet arrived, and he made his way at once into the hotel, and without waiting to send up his card, jumped into the elevator. He told the elevator man to let him off at the fourth floor, and a moment later he rapped at the door of room 43.

The door was opened by a tall, sickly-looking man, and Thad guessed, from the description he had heard of him, that he was the person he wanted to see.

"This is Mr. Morton, I presume?" he began.

"That is my name," responded the young man, with an inquiring look at the detective.

"My name is Jones," pursued Thad, "and I wish to have a word with you on important business."

Morton looked suspiciously at him and instead of inviting him to enter the room, held the door in such a way that it was impossible for him to get in.

"What is it?" he inquired somewhat impatiently.

"It will be necessary for me to begin by telling you that I am a detective."

"A detective? What do you want with me?" demanded the young man, irritably.

"I have come to warn you against a party who have evil designs upon you, in fact, it is my opinion that they intend to put you out of the way."

The fellow gave him a sneering glance, and then asked with a contemptuous curl of the lip:

"That's pretty good. Who sent you?"

Thad saw that it would be necessary to invest himself with some authority in order to impress the intended victim, so he replied:

"The superintendent of police, sir."

The fellow laughed.

"He imagines that I am not able to take care of myself, eh?"

"Perhaps so. And you may find that such is the case if you do not listen to my advice. You had a visit from a Jew this afternoon, did you not?"

"Mr. Einstein, yes. What of it?"

"Well, he is one of the most notorious characters in the city, and his object in persuading you to invest your fifty thousand dollars is to lure you to a lonely spot where you will be murdered and the money taken away from you."

"How do you know this?" still incredulously.

"I heard the plot talked over myself."

This was an unfortunate remark, as it proved, for the young man laughed and said:

"This is a likely story! If Mr. Einstein were the kind of man you would have me believe, he would not be likely to talk over his secrets in the presence of detectives."

"Certainly not, if he knew they were present, but in this case he did not. I was in a position to overhear the conversation, however, and if you choose to disregard my warning, you will do so at your cost."

"It is very kind of you, Mr. Jones, to come up here and warn me, but I do not choose to take it. I happen to know Mr. Einstein personally, and know him to be a perfect gentleman. If I get into trouble, it will be my own fault. Good-night."

And he closed the door in Burr's face.

Thad was angry enough to let him suffer for his insolence, had he not considered it his duty to save him, fool as he was.

He was about to turn away from the door when Shaw and Carpenter arrived, and knocked at the door.

CHAPTER XIX.

A VILLAINOUS PLOT.

SHAW and Carpenter had walked past the detective without apparently noting his presence, and he made the mistake of imagining that such was the case.

He had stepped to one side in the dimly-lighted hall, and they were certainly paying no attention to him then, and they waited for the door to be opened for them.

Burr thought rapidly, and soon decided what to do.

He had no warrant for the men's arrest, but under the circumstances he knew that he would be justified in arresting them.

But a few seconds had elapsed, and the door was not yet opened, when he stepped quickly up to the men and covering them with a revolver, commanded:

"Frank Carpenter and Harry Shaw, in the name of the law, I arrest you!"

They made no response, but turned and regarded him with the utmost coolness.

Then Shaw, who was always the spokesman when these two were together, asked in a quiet voice:

"Upon what charge, sir?"

"The murder of Harrison W. Higgins," replied Thad.

"Very well," returned Carpenter, in the same cool, unperturbed tone. "We have no objection to going with you, but, as American citizens we will ask you to show your warrant."

"That will not be necessary. You will be satisfied as to my authority as soon as I get you to Police Headquarters."

"That will not be satisfactory to us, sir, and we refuse to go with you!" retorted Carpenter defiantly.

"You refuse to go?"

"We do?"

"Very well. It will be the worse for you. You will not leave this house as free men, nor will you be permitted to carry out the villainous plot you are about to undertake, as vassals of Samuel Einstein, this night!"

With that he turned on his heel and left them, just as the door was opened to receive them.

Jumping on the elevator, he reached the office in another minute or two, and the succeeding minute he was at the telephone. Calling up the nearest police station, he asked them to send a patrol wagon and as many men as they could muster instantly, and when he had told the sergeant who he was, the request was promised.

"Lose no time," he admonished, "for the game may slip away at any instant."

Then came a period of anxiety.

He expected the men to descend with their victim at any second, and his only hope was that the police would arrive first.

Five minutes passed, and then the rumble of the patrol wagon was heard outside, and the next minute a sergeant and four men filed into the hotel lobby. Still the men up-stairs had not put in an appearance, and Thad grew uneasy.

"Where are your prisoners, detective?" asked the sergeant, looking anxiously about.

"Up-stairs," replied Burr. "I expect them down any instant."

"What's the matter with going up and hurrying 'em up a bit?"

"That's what I was thinking of, bu—"

Here he hesitated. A sudden thought had struck him.

Turning to the clerk, he inquired:

"Is there another entrance to this hotel?"

"Yes," returned the clerk, "the ladies' entrance."

"This way, sergeant," cried the detective.

"Take your squad to the ladies' entrance, and I'll go up and see what has become of the game."

The officer obeyed the order, and Thad jumped on the elevator and was soon on the fourth floor again.

He knocked vigorously at the door of 43, but there was no response, and his worst fears appeared to be realized. But he knock-

ed a second time, and the door was opened by the sickly young gentleman.

"Well?" he muttered ill-naturedly. "What do you want now?"

"Are those two men here?" inquired Thad, trying to peer into the room.

The young man threw open the door with a dogged air, and growled.

"See for yourself."

There was no one there.

"What has become of them?" demanded the detective.

"Ask me an easy one. They left here ten minutes ago."

"You decided not to go with them, then?"

"Certainly," replied the other, with a sneering expression. "How could I have gone after what you told me? Besides, the night is not such as to permit me to venture out."

Here he was seized with a fit of coughing, which lasted for a full minute, and before it terminated, he closed the door in the detective's face again.

Burr was perplexed.

He was not satisfied with the truth of the young man's statement, and more than half believed that it was a *ruse* to throw him off the track.

The attempted arrest had been a mistake. It had served no other purpose than to put the rascals on their guard, and coupled with that, Morton had doubtless told them what Thad had said about the intended plot, and they had concocted a scheme between them to defeat his ends.

Carpenter and Shaw were pretty well convinced that an attempt would be made to arrest them as they left the hotel, and the plan was for them to leave alone, by way of the ladies' exit, and then the young man was to meet them at the rendezvous, at the foot of Fulton street, later. And to disarm suspicion, Morton was to remain in the room for some time, so that if the police should suspect anything and call at the room, they would find him there.

All this flashed through Burr's mind in the space of a few seconds, and then, taking the Twenty-eighth street elevator, he soon joined the sergeant at the ladies' entrance.

"The birds have flown," he said, "but there is yet a chance of bagging them. The intended victim is still up there, and my plan will be to watch and follow him."

"The intended victim?" echoed the officer, who knew nothing of the nature of the case.

"What is it, a green-goods deal?"

"Worse than that," rejoined Thad. And then briefly outlined the plot to carry the young heir off and murder him and relieve him of his wealth.

"Why not detain him?" suggested the sergeant. "That will make sure of it."

"It would prevent the perpetration of this one particular crime, but it would not prevent any future ones. What I am after is the capture of the perpetrators, and there is a chance of doing it by following this chap. Or, what would do just as well, go straight to the place of rendezvous and pick them up there."

"You know where that is, then?"

"I do."

"You'd better go the central station for your escort then. We can't go with you, unless it's in our precinct."

"I know you have no right to, but couldn't you strain a point?"

"Not for any money. I'll hold this fellow, if you wish, but I can do no more."

"Do that, then," rejoined Thad impatiently, "and I'll see if I can get an escort from the central station in time."

He was about to start off, when a sudden thought occurred to him.

"This fellow is in room forty-three, sergeant," he remarked. "You'd better go right up and take him into custody."

"I can't do that," rejoined the officer, who was one of those policemen who are in constant dread of transcending their authority. "The best I can do is to prevent him from leaving the hotel."

"In that case, you had better station part of your men at each entrance. And even then, you would not know him from any other guest if he did come out."

"Maybe I might if you told me what he looks like."

Burr gave a brief description of Morton,

and then hastened into the hotel office and had recourse to the telephone again.

Calling up the central station, he informed the man in attendance who he was and, in as few words as possible, what was in the wind. He then requested that a squad of men be dispatched to the foot of Fulton street to await his orders.

"If possible," he concluded, "let them go in citizen's clothes, as it may be necessary to do a little quiet work."

The sergeant in charge informed him that he did not believe the thing would be possible, but he would see what could be done.

Burr then left the hotel and, taking a cab, had himself driven to Fulton Ferry.

It was close on to midnight by this time, exceedingly dark and the rain was driving down in fine, penetrating lines that went to the very marrow.

Few people were to be seen about the ferry, an odd truckman or two, or a belated workman returning to Brooklyn, and the place was dreary beyond description.

Pulling the collar of his mackintosh up about his ears, Thad made his way along the slippery, cobble-stoned pavement to the upper end of the ferry-house, and walked out on the long pier, which was piled on each side with freight, covered with tarpaulins, which shimmered in the spasmodic flickering of the electric light on the end of the pier.

The pier was deserted and desolate, and nobody would have guessed that a horrible crime was about to be perpetrated there, or rather have its beginning there to be consummated somewhere else.

The detective walked out to the end of the piers and looked down into the black waters of the East River. A few small boats were moored alongside, but there was no appearance of any of them being manned, and he began to apprehend that the plot had either been abandoned or the place of rendezvous changed to foil him.

He strolled back to the street end of the pier, and gazed into the darkness and off at the flickering lights in and about Burling Slip, and strained his eyes for the approach of either the patrol from the central station or a carriage containing the victim of the horrible plot, but neither was to be seen.

Again he strolled back to the outer end of the pier and looked up at the great arching bridge with its arc of lights and the moving specks of light passing over it. Still there was no sign of life about the pier.

Then suddenly there came the rumble of wheels, and as the detective started back toward the street, the patrol wagon dashed up to the ferry-house.

He hastened up to it and gave his instructions hastily and in a low voice.

"Dismount your men, sergeant," he said, "and let them take shelter in the ferry-house, and let the wagon drive down toward the Slip a ways so as not to attract attention. The parties haven't arrived yet, and I don't want them frightened off when they do come."

The instructions were obeyed, and the men were soon housed in the waiting-room of the ferry-house and the wagon driven off a half a block from the spot. In five minutes no one arriving would have suspected that any preparations on the part of the police had been made or that there was a policeman within a mile of the place. The men in the ferry-house were in citizens' clothes, and no one would have suspected that they were anything more than a parcel of citizens awaiting the ferry to take them over the river.

When matters had been thus arranged Burr made another visit to the pier, walked out to the end of it and looked down at the boats moored alongside.

He noticed something now which had not attracted his attention before. One of the boats was covered with tarpaulin.

This was an unusual sight, but after reflecting for some time Thad concluded that there might be some freight in it, although the owners, he decided, must have been remarkably careless or the freight was not very valuable, else they would not have left it there, subject to the caprice of the elements and the cupidity of dock thieves.

He was once more sauntering slowly toward the street, when a closed carriage drove up to the end of the pier. He had

merely time to crouch behind a pile of freight and conceal himself, when three men, one after another, alighted from the carriage.

They were robed in mackintoshes that touched their heels, and the collars were pulled up about their faces so as to completely hide their features, even if it had been light enough there to see them distinctly.

Nevertheless, Thad had no doubt that they were his men, and at once thought of the sergeant at the hotel and wondered what kind of a guard he could have kept, for one of the party must be Morton.

As soon as they had alighted one of them said something in an undertone, upon which all three started for the outer end of the pier.

As they passed the detective he heard one of them say:

"I hope our boat is here."

Thad recognized the voice as that of Shaw, and knew then that he had not been mistaken in his guess.

When they were far enough past him so that there was no danger of them noticing his action, he glided from his place of concealment and hastened around into the ferry-house.

"Here they are, sergeant," he cried. "There is no time to lose. They are on the end of the pier, and if their boat is in waiting, they will be off in no time."

"What's the plan?" inquired the officer.

"Come along, one or two at a time, in an unconcerned manner, as if we were a lot of workmen expecting a barge in. We can assemble at the end of the pier without attracting their attention."

With that the detective and the officer strolled along together and the men came along in pairs, as if they had nothing to do with one another.

The three men had already reached the end of the pier and one of them, whom Thad recognized by his voice as Shaw, was speaking to some one in one of the small boats.

Burr then noticed that the boat with the tarpaulin had suddenly developed a remarkable animation. The covering had been thrown aside and six burly longshoremen sat there ready to man the oars at a moment's notice.

What Burr heard after his arrival on the end of the pier was this:

"Ye've changed yer plan?" said the man in the boat.

"Yes," replied the man on the dock. "Row across and meet us at Jewell's Dock, Brooklyn. We'll cross in the ferry."

"All right," growled the waterman. "If ye'd 'a' tould us that afore we'd 'a' been thar now. Put away, lads!"

And the boat was shoved off, and the men soon began to ply the oars.

Then the three men turned and were about to walk back to the street, when at a signal from the detective the squad of police stepped, in a body, in front of them, while Thad ordered:

"Stop! You are my prisoners!"

The men were completely taken by surprise.

Shaw and Carpenter jumped back and attempted to draw their revolvers, but the police intercepted them by covering them with their own weapons.

"None of that!" roared Burr. "Throw up your hands and drop those guns!"

"Thunder!" growled Shaw. "It's that cursed detective!"

CHAPTER XX.

A CHANGE OF PROGRAMME.

THE two crooks saw that it was all up with them, and with a curse they threw down their pistols.

In a twinkling Burr had the darbies on them, and he then told the sergeant that he might bring the patrol wagon back.

One of the men was dispatched for this purpose, and the three men were marched to the street to await the arrival of the wagon.

All this time Morton had appeared to be in a state of semi-consciousness. He did not appear able to comprehend what it all meant.

Not another word passed between any of them until they were seated in the patrol-

wagon, which Thad had insisted upon their taking, in spite of Morton's request to have a hack, and then the young man, who was sitting next to Burr, asked:

"What am I arrested for?"

"That is a strange question now, it strikes me," returned the detective. "I thought I had explained the matter fully enough when I came to your door."

"Oh, are you the same gentleman who warned me not to go with these gentlemen?" he asked in surprise.

"I guess I am."

"Still, I do not see why I should be arrested, as I have done nothing."

"We sometimes arrest people to prevent them from doing things. An ounce of prevention, they say, is better than a pound of cure."

"But what I was going to do was nothing criminal."

"That remains to be seen when we learn what it was you were going to do, or rather what you thought you were going to do. I know what these other men's intentions were, but they had doubtless led you to believe that the trip was for some other purpose. Whether it was anything criminal or not, you should have known that you would not have been dragged off at this time of night and to such a place as that to which you were going, for any legitimate transaction. Perhaps a confession of the object of this trip would help your case."

The young man was silent for a long time. Meanwhile the wagon jolted along over the rough cobble-stones at a furious rate.

Finally he spoke in a low tone, just loud enough for the detective to hear, and so that the two crooks could not:

"This confession you speak of would have to be made to the judge, I presume?"

"Yes. You will be tried before the police justice to-morrow morning, and he will probably give you a chance to plead your case, when he will either release or remand you for further trial before a higher court. He may only fine you and let you go."

"Meanwhile, what?"

"Meanwhile you will be locked in a common cell the same as the other prisoners."

The young man sighed heavily.

"I had better have taken your advice," he said.

"Yes, it would have been better. But it is too late now."

"Is there no way of making this confession to night—to you, for instance—and getting released on bail?"

Burr reflected.

There might be some light thrown upon the mystery he was working to unravel by allowing this fellow to confess. Moreover, he would be a willing witness against the leader of this murderous gang. However, if he were locked up, he would be all the more willing to testify against the Jew for getting him into such trouble. Therefore Thad was in a quandary what to do. He was always inclined to be merciful, and in this fellow's condition it seemed as though it was his duty to be merciful.

"Do you know anybody in the city?" asked the detective at length, "anybody who would be likely to go on your bond for your appearance in court?"

After a moment's reflection, he answered:

"Yes, there are several people whom I could refer to, and any of them could and would fill my bond, but I wouldn't like to let them know that I had been mixed up in this affair."

"Then I see no other chance for you but to go to jail."

After another silence, he suggested:

"I have quite a lot of money here—"

"Fifty thousand dollars, eh?" interposed Thad.

"Why, yes. How did you know?"

"I know all about it. As I told you at the hotel, I overheard the Jew and his vassals making the bargain, and he said you had fifty thousand dollars."

"Yes, I have that amount in my pocket. Suppose I let you take it, and you assume the responsibility of my appearance?"

Thad pondered the matter, and concluded that the young man would not be likely to run away and leave that amount of money, and that he (the detective) could safely guarantee his appearance on such terms.

"I will do that," he said at length. "I

will assume the risk, and you need not be arraigned."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" cried the young man, rapturously. "This is indeed kind, as it would kill me to remain in a cell all night."

"That is my principal reason for doing what I am."

They soon reached the Tombs station, and the prisoners were taken before the sergeant at the desk and committed.

"What is the charge, detective?" asked the sergeant.

"Attempting to lure a victim away for the purpose of robbery and possibly murder," rejoined Burr.

"Caught in the act?" added the officer.

"Yes, sir."

"Who is the other man, Mr. Burr?" asked the sergeant, looking over at Morton.

"The intended victim."

"We will have to retain him, too, of course."

"I wish to have charge of him, sergeant, if you please. I will be responsible for his appearance."

"You wish to question him, I suppose, Mr. Burr?"

"I do, sir."

"Very well. His name, age and residence, please."

Morton stepped up and answered the regulation questions. The prisoners were then taken to cells and Thad and his man left the station.

They entered a carriage and were driven to the Sturtevant House. At the young man's invitation, Burr went up to his room with him.

When the gas was light and the men were seated, the young man began:

"I do not know how I shall ever thank you or repay you sufficiently for what you have done for me this night, sir. Nor do I know how I shall condemn myself enough for being such a fool as I was."

"I do not know about the latter," smiled the detective. "You will have plenty of time to devote to that hereafter, I presume, but regarding the former, I shall feel more than repaid when you have made a clean breast of the shady transaction you were about to enter into when I apprehended you, for I am convinced it was shady, or you would not have gone into it in the manner you did."

"You are right," rejoined the young man with a deep sigh. "The thing smacked somewhat of that."

"Tell me all about it, how you came to get with this man and what the scheme was."

"Well, to begin with, I may as well tell you that Einstein is my uncle by marriage, his present wife being my aunt. That is how I got acquainted with him. About two months ago my father died leaving me something over a hundred thousand dollars, over fifty thousand of which was in cash. As soon as Einstein heard of it he commenced corresponding with me, and finally suggested a plan by which I could increase my wealth ten-fold. I did not want to go into it at first, telling him that I had enough to last me what time I should live, but he kept at me, holding out all kinds of glowing inducements, such as foreign travel, the pleasures of city life, and the like, and finally persuaded me that I would like to be a millionaire, or a half a millionaire."

"What was the scheme?" interposed Burr.

"I am coming to that. At length, as I say, he got me into the notion of going into the scheme. He would not tell me what it was until I came on here, only assuring me that my fifty thousand dollars would yield five hundred thousand inside of a week if invested as he proposed. Finally I agreed to to come on—I lived in California—and arrived here yesterday afternoon. I had telegraphed him when I would arrive and he called at the hotel a short time after my arrival. Then he laid the scheme before me. He said that a couple of old sailors who had been shipwrecked had come in possession of over a million dollars' worth of diamonds, that they had arrived in the city a short time before and were afraid to dispose of the jewels lest they should be arrested, as they did not know who the diamonds had belonged to. He said that he had learned of the fact by the merest accident, and had paid a visit

to the sailors, who were living in a retired way in a tenement in Brooklyn.

"He had tried to purchase the stones, but they wanted more than he was able to pay, or rather he only had about half enough—that is, fifty thousand dollars—to pay for them, and they would not sell unless the purchaser took the whole lot, at one hundred thousand dollars."

"He said that the old fellows were so suspicious that they would not allow anybody to come to the tenement where they lived for the property, and that the only way we could get them would be to meet them in a lonely place near the harbor."

"I thought it a little strange, but I had always regarded him as a perfectly honorable man, and suspected nothing wrong, so we were to make the trip to-night and meet the old fellows somewhere above the Atlantic Docks."

"So there was nothing wrong, so far as you were concerned," interposed the detective. "If the diamonds had been obtained in the manner described by him there would have been nothing wrong in your purchasing them. But, in the first place, there were no diamonds in existence, except in his mind, and the whole scheme was to get you in the lonely spot referred to and put you out of the way and take your money."

"How did you happen to come in possession of these facts, sir?"

"Why, I have been working on this man's case for nearly a month. I have traced his rascality from one point to another until I have sufficient evidence already to hang him."

"To hang him?"

"Yes, for murder."

"You know that he has committed murder?"

"Yes—at least it was committed at his instigation, as yours would have been. He is sharp enough to keep in the background himself, but I have evidence to prove that he is at the bottom of it all. It was through tracing this matter up that I discovered the plot to night."

"How was that?"

"I had gone to a rendezvous of theirs in company with his wife—"

"Einstein's wife?"

"Yes."

"What was that for?"

"She wanted to satisfy herself as to what she had been told about her husband's rascality. Well, we got into a place where we could look into the room where he and his henchmen were assembled, and she saw enough to convince her that what she had heard was strictly true, and had me take her away. I afterward went back, however, and soon afterward these two fellows who were with you to-night came in, and then I heard all the details of the plot to murder you and obtain the money, even to the bargain as to how much each of the underlings was to receive for doing the job."

"My God! This is awful!" cried the young man, growing very pale. "And if it had not been for you I would probably have been murdered before this time!"

"Unquestionably."

"Well, sir," resumed Morton, handing Burr his purse, "there are fifty thousand dollars in there. Count it and see. Only for you I should have lost it all, and my life in the bargain. Keep half of it for yourself as your reward."

"No, sir, not a cent. I am paid for my work, and I require nothing extra for doing my duty. I will hold this, however, pending your examination. Now tell me, you say that Einstein's wife is your aunt?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are on good terms with her, I presume?"

"Certainly, we have always been on friendly terms."

"How was it, then, that her husband allowed you to go to a hotel, on arriving in the city, instead of taking you home with him?"

"It was his idea. He did not want my aunt to know I was in the city until after the transaction was completed. He claimed that she would be bothering me to know what I was doing here, and might gain a hint of what we were up to. He said that when the whole thing was over and we had

the money for the diamonds, we would tell her about it and have a laugh over it."

"Very considerate in him, wasn't it?"

"Very."

"Now, don't you see what his reason was for not wanting her to know you were in the city?"

"I imagine I do."

"He could not trust her with his secret, because she is an honest woman, and if she had known you were in the city before the transaction she might have asked troublesome questions afterward as to what had become of you."

"I see now that what you say is only too true," sighed Morton. "His intention was to murder me, there can be no doubt about that. And you say my aunt knows about it?"

"She knows nothing about this particular plot, but she is acquainted with his general character."

"And yet she continues to live with him?"

"She knew nothing definitely until to-night. I had told her about him, but she did not believe me, until she went with me to-night and saw for herself. She avows that she never wants to see him again, but I do not know whether she will remain in that mind or not. I suppose you will call upon your dear uncle and aunt before you leave the city," laughed Burr.

"I should like to see her, but not him, and I should be afraid to call for fear I might meet him."

"Well, I guess I can arrange it for you to meet her without seeing him."

"How?"

"I will have her come over to the Madison House to-morrow, for she will be anxious to know how we came out to-night anyway, and you call there."

"About what time?"

"Say two o'clock."

"I shall be there."

"Come right up to room 65. You need not ask for me at the office. I shall like to have you come, as we may be able to hatch up something between us to trap the old rascal. However, my task will be comparatively easy, now that I have his two lieutenants in limbo."

"I suppose I must be at the Tombs police court in the morning?"

"Yes, about nine o'clock. I will see you there. Good-night, or rather good-morning."

Daylight was breaking when Burr left the hotel and started to walk down Broadway to Twenty-fourth street, and thence across to Fourth avenue to the Madison House, and the streets were nearly deserted, save for an occasional pedestrian. The rain had ceased, and a few stars had struggled out as if to have at least one peep before the sun blotted them out together.

He had just reached the entrance of the hotel and was about to enter, when he was attracted by a footstep close behind him, and turning, he came face to face with the mysterious veiled woman.

CHAPTER XXI.

A STRANGE STORY.

BESTOWING a casual glance upon the woman, Burr was about to enter the hotel without any further notice of her, when to his unutterable astonishment, he heard his name called, and again turning about, found that it had come from her.

He could hardly credit his senses, and the next instant the thought flashed upon him that it was Mrs. Einstein, and wondered what she could be doing there at that time of the morning.

But he was not long in suspense, for the woman came straight up to him and continued:

"Pardon me, sir, for bothering you at this time, for I know that you have had very little if any sleep, but the matter which I wish to speak to you about must be told at once, or it will be too late."

Thad was more puzzled than ever.

At first he had thought it was the Jew's wife, but knew that she did not know his right name. His next thought was that it was the deaf and dumb woman, who had learned to say a few words, as mutes are

taught to speak nowadays, but the sentence she had just uttered was wholly unlike the parrot-like language of the mute. It was more like the talk of a refined and educated lady.

But whoever she might be, what she had to say was of more importance just then.

"What is it you wish to tell me?" he asked.

"I cannot tell it here," she said. "We must go to some place where we will not be disturbed nor overheard. I have been watching for you ever since you returned from arresting Carpenter and Shaw, and I had almost come to the conclusion that you were not coming back here."

Thad reflected upon where he could take the woman. He did not like to take her into the hotel, much less to his room, at that hour, and yet he was anxious to hear what she had to tell.

"Is what you have to tell me in regard to the arrest?" he asked by way of killing time.

"Yes, partly that, and partly about another person whom you would like to arrest."

"Whom do you refer to?"

"Einstein."

"What about him?"

"For one thing, he is about to leave the city. He will be gone by noon, unless you stop him. But there are other matters which I wish to speak to you about, and which must be in private."

"Well, come on. I'll see if I cannot find a place to talk."

And the detective led the way into the hotel-lobby, and walked up to the clerk's desk.

Whispering a few words in the night-clerk's ear, he turned to the woman and told her to follow him, and then ascended to the next floor and unlocking the door to sixty-five, went in. The woman was close upon his heels, and stood there motionless and mute until the door was closed and locked.

It was still dark in the room, so he lit the gas, and then asked the woman to be seated.

She complied, and as she sunk into a chair, threw back her veil.

Then Burr was astonished.

It was not the woman whom he had seen in the mutes' tenement at all, but a much younger woman, and a very beautiful one. Indeed, at first sight he was sure the Jew's wife stood before him, but upon closer inspection he saw that she was not, but there was a wonderful resemblance.

He stood staring at her so that she was forced to smile.

"I do not wonder that you stare at me," she said. "You mistook me for the veiled woman who has been coming about here for some time past, didn't you?"

"I did think you were she or another woman whom I know."

"Well, you see it was neither of them but just me."

Thad seated himself near her and took another survey of her face, and then asked:

"Are you not some relation to Mrs. Einstein?"

"Her sister, that is all," she replied, smiling.

Burr was interested now.

There must be something decidedly interesting about her story, and he said:

"Well, what is it you wish to tell me?"

"First of all, I want to tell you that Einstein intends to leave the country by a ship that sails some time to-day, and if you wish to catch him you must be sharp."

"What line is he going by?"

"That I have not been able to learn. All I know is that he is going. But you can easily find out by looking up what ships are going to-day and examining their registers."

"Yes, there will be no trouble about that. But how did you find out that he was going?"

"I heard him tell Marion."

"Marion?"

"Yes, his wife."

"Ah! Then he has been home?"

"Yes, he came home last night."

"What time?"

"About ten o'clock, I should think."

"Then you live in the house?"

"I do."

"How did his wife receive him when he came home?"

"As usual. Cordially."

"Is she going abroad with him?"

"Certainly. He would not go without her."

Thad was at a loss to know whether to believe the woman or not. If she was telling the truth, then Mrs. Einstein was the most perfidious woman he had ever seen. And what angered him most was to think she had got possession of many of his secrets, and had undoubtedly told her husband.

"Were you aware that she went with me to visit the rendezvous of Einstein's gang last night?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yes, she told me she was going."

"How did you learn about the arrest?"

"One of Sam's men brought the news to the house as soon as it was made."

"One of the mutes?"

"Yes."

"What was your reason for coming here to inform me of his intended flight?"

"I want him arrested."

"You don't like him then?"

"On the contrary, I love him. I should think you might know that from what you saw—"

She paused, but she had already said enough for the acute detective to guess the rest.

"I understand," he smiled. "It was you who came into my room that day and knelt at his feet."

She colored and showed signs of anger, but after a little she burst out laughing and replied:

"Yes, you have caught me. It was I. I loved him long before he married Marion, but he always spurned me as you saw him that day, and still I was fool enough to go on loving him. He cared nothing for me, and yet he feared me. He told me his secrets when he would not think of telling them to his wife. It was not till last night, however, that I realized what a fool I have been making of myself, and then all of a sudden my love turned to hate, and I was at once devoured with the desire to have him arrested and punished for his crimes. This was before the news came of the arrest, and then when that arrived, and I heard him tell Marion that the game was up with him, and that he must get out of the country before another day, I promised myself that if you could do anything in the direction of stopping him, he should not go."

"We'll stop him, if there is any chance of it. But tell me, you told him, that day you were in my room, that I was a detective and advised him to make his escape, did you not?"

"Yes."

"How did you know that I was a detective?"

"It will surprise you when I tell you that," she laughed. "If you remember, you left the central station that morning and went home by street-car?"

"I remember."

"I saw you leave the station and guessed you were a detective, so I followed you to your house. I then watched the house till you came out, which was not until late in the evening."

"And you knew me?"

"Yes. I would not have known you, only I knew that there was no other man in the house (I learned this from your servant,) and then I recognized the walk as the same as that of the tramp I had seen going in. I followed you, and found that you came here, and so I waited on the sidewalk till you and Sam came out, and again followed you to this house. I listened at the door and thought from the admissions you were forcing out of him that you would soon put him under arrest. I was determined that you should not, and so interfered, as you saw."

"But how was it you did not speak all that time?"

"I had two reasons for that. First, I did not want you to know what I was saying, and second, I wanted you to think, as you did, that I was the deaf and dumb woman."

"That was clever. But how did you know she was in the habit of coming about here?"

"I saw her."

"You knew her, then?"

"Yes, at least by reputation. Sam had told me about her."

"Were you acquainted with his rascality?"

"I had some idea about it. It was not—"

till recently that I knew he was as bad as he really was."

"How did you find it out finally?"

"First, I got hold of one of his circulars and asked him what it meant. He put me off, but told me enough so that when I read in the paper about the man from Missouri being found murdered, I knew it was his work, or at least that of his men."

"And still you wanted to shield him?"

"Yes, for I was a fool. I wouldn't do it again."

"Did your sister know anything about what he was doing?"

"I don't believe she did. She is very innocent about such matters and believed all he told her."

"Was she aware of your love for him?"

"She knew I loved him before they were married, but I never allowed her to know it afterward. I did not want to make her unhappy."

"Do you know what her motive was for visiting the rendezvous in Avenue D?"

"To learn something about what he was doing. He had not come home for two nights, and somebody had told her that he was up to some sort of wickedness, although I am confident she hadn't the least idea what it was."

"There is where you make a great mistake. In the first place she did not go there to find out about some sort of wickedness, except that she thought he was infatuated with the deaf and dumb woman, and in the second place, she knew, or had been informed with regard to the nature of his wickedness, before she went there with me. I will do her the justice to say that she did not more than half believe what I had told her about his criminal affairs. But she saw enough while there to convince her that what I had told her was the truth. What did she say when she came home?"

"Nothing, except that she had been slumming. But when I pressed her, she finally told me where she had been, but said nothing about seeing Sam there."

Burr was silent some moments, and then asked:

"When did you leave the house?"

"A short time after the news of the arrest came, I told you," she answered. "About midnight or a little after."

"He was still there when you left, was he?"

"Yes."

"Do you imagine he will remain all night?"

"I think that is his intention."

"He will probably be there yet, then?"

"I shouldn't wonder, although I know he intends to leave very early in the morning."

"Well, suppose you go back, and I will go and get a warrant for his arrest, and when I come there half an hour hence, you can let me into the house without any one being the wiser."

"I will do it. Come to the area door. I will watch for you and be ready to let you in."

"Thanks. That is the only way we will ever catch him, unless it is as he goes aboard the steamer, and the difficulty about that would be that he would register under an assumed name. We had better be off at once."

Five minutes later they left the hotel, she returning to Einstein's house, and he going to the nearest police justice for a warrant for the arrest of Sheeny Sam.

It was too early for any of the justices to be at their courts, but the detective was acquainted with one who did not live a great way off, and he went to his house.

Scarcely half an hour had elapsed when he was back at the house in Fifteenth street. It was not yet six o'clock, and the streets were thronged with people on their way to work.

Thad went down into the areaway, and the door was opened to him before he had time to knock.

"Easy!" she whispered. "None of the servants are stirring yet, and there will be nothing in the way."

"Is he still here?"

"Yes. I went up to his room just now to make sure, and I could hear him breathing. Go right up."

"Where is his room?"

"The first one on the right when you get up stairs."

"Where is her room?"

"On the other side of the hall. You aren't going to arrest her too, are you?"

"No. I only wanted to know, so that I wouldn't disturb her."

"There is no danger of that if you are quiet."

"I will be as quiet as possible, but I'll have to knock at the door."

Thad then crept up the stairs. The halls were still quite dark, and he was compelled to move very cautiously to keep from running against anything.

When he reached the first floor above the basement he stopped and listened to make sure that nobody was stirring, and hearing nothing, moved on up the next flight of stairs.

When he reached the door of the room indicated by the woman he put his ear to the keyhole and listened. Sure enough, as the woman had said, there was the sound of breathing, and he rapped lightly on the door.

Then he listened again, and discovered that the breathing had ceased. This indicated that the sleeper had awoke, and the detective rapped again.

Presently some one said:

"Who's there?"

A happy thought occurred to Thad. If the Jew intended to leave early, he had doubtless instructed his servant to awake him. So he answered:

"It's time to get up, sah."

Then came the sound of rustling bed-clothes, and a little later of feet shuffling over the carpet.

Thad drew his revolver and waited eagerly.

It seemed an age, but at last he heard the key turned in the lock, and in another instant the door was opened a few inches and somebody's face appeared.

It was too dark to recognize any one, but Thad did not wait for that.

Placing his foot between the door and the jamb to prevent the door from being closed, he shoved the muzzle of his revolver in the face at the crack and said:

"Samuel Einstein, you are my prisoner!"

Quicker than a flash the person inside attempted to close the door, and finding this impossible, vanished into the room.

No sooner had he done so, when the detective flung the door wide open and dashed in.

The fellow had run to the furthest corner of the room and was crouching there, evidently frightened out of his wits.

Running up to him and again pushing the muzzle of his revolver into his face, Thad repeated:

"You are my prisoner! Come out of that, or I shall fire!"

"What am I arrested for?" whined the fellow, showing a portion of his face for the first time.

Burr then saw that it was not the Jew, but a young man not more than eighteen.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CLEVER TRICK.

WHEN a full realization of the situation flashed upon Burr he was not only astonished, but furious.

That a trick had been played upon him there was not the least doubt, and that this clever woman, coming to him in the guise of an informer, was at the bottom of it, there appeared to be as little room for doubt.

His first impulse was to rush down-stairs again and throttle the wily creature for her perfidy, but on second thought he concluded that he would only be wasting time, and turned his attention to the frightened young man instead.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the detective savagely.

"Why—why, sir, I belong here," pleaded the quaking youth.

"Is not this Mr. Devreaux's room?"

"No, sir, this is my room."

"Did he never have this room?"

"No, sir."

"Where is his room?"

"He used to have the room across the hall, back, but he isn't here any more."

"Isn't here any more? What do you mean?"

"He's left."

"How long since?"

"Nearly a month, I guess."

Thad was perplexed. He did not know whether to believe the boy was lying deliberately, or was a fool.

"Come, now!" he uttered impatiently, "don't tell me that. I have seen him here within a week."

"I don't know," whined the boy, shaking his head dubiously. "I haven't seen him for nearly a month, and they told me he was gone."

"His wife is still here, isn't she?"

"Yes, she is here off and on."

"Off and on? What do you mean? Is she not always here?"

"No, sir."

Thad was about to denounce him as the champion liar of the world, but modified his expression and asked:

"If he is gone, why is his name still on the door?"

"Why, you see he used to occupy the house before he failed in business, and then he sold everything to his brother-in-law, Mr. Einstein, and only kept a room for himself and his wife, and then there was some trouble between him and his wife, and he went off and left her."

Here was a genuine surprise for Burr. Up to that instant he had supposed Einstein and Devreaux to be one and the same man. And he was still more perplexed when he recalled the event of his first visit when the Jew's wife responded to his inquiry for Mrs. Devreaux.

"Look here, boy, are you telling me the truth?" he cried impatiently.

"Yes, sir," whimpered the boy in a scared voice. "If you don't believe me, you may ask my sister."

"Who is your sister?"

"Mrs. Einstein."

"Is she here?"

"Yes, sir. Her room is just across the hall."

"Where is Mr. Einstein?"

"He is in his room, in bed, I s'pose."

"Where is his room?"

"The front one, next to this."

"You are sure he is in?"

"Yes, sir, I am quite sure he is."

The detective was elated by this intelligence, and lost no time in making his way to the other door. A few vigorous raps brought the sleepy response:

"Who's there?"

"Come see!" was the reply.

"Who are you?" called the voice, apparently more wide awake this time.

"Open the door, or I'll show you who I am!"

Then came a shuffling sound, mingled with a muttering which indicated that the person inside was in no very good humor.

Finally, after a long wait, the door was opened a few inches and the face of a middle-aged man of undoubted Jewish extraction, appeared.

Burr had resolved upon milder tactics in this instance, and did not present a weapon, but merely asked:

"Is this Mr. Einstein?"

"That is my name," replied the man, with a surprised look. "What do you want?"

"Mr. Samuel Einstein?" pursued the detective, determined to make sure.

"Yes, sir," replied the man at the door, his look of astonishment increasing momentarily. "What do you want?"

"Mr. Einstein, I hold a warrant for your arrest," said Thad.

"My arrest?" cried the man in a voice of mingled consternation and alarm.

"Yes, sir."

"There must be some mistake, sir. What have I done?"

"The charge is murder," rejoined Burr, referring to the warrant which he held in his hand. "The murder of one Harrison W. Higgins, of Bolivar, Missouri."

"My God! What does this mean?" he gasped. "There is some horrible mistake here. I never so much as killed a kitten in my life!"

The detective was beginning to think also that there was some mistake, and when the man, in his paroxysm of horror, allowed the door to swing open and Thad got a good view of his face, he was convinced that there was a terrible mistake. It was not the man whom he had seen at all.

He stood transfixed for some minutes, unable to speak, while the two men stared at each other in a state of stupid bewilderment.

Burr was the first to recover his speech, and he said:

"Yes, you are right, sir. There is a mistake, and a horrible one. And yet I am at my wits' end how to explain it. Perhaps you can help me out. For nearly a month I have been on the trail of a scoundrel and murderer who had been carrying on a vicious business on Grand street, and had a rendezvous in a tenement in Avenue D, and who went by the name of S. Einstein. Nearly a month ago I followed a couple of rascals to this house, and one of them rung the bell, when a man came out of the house and joined them. I then followed the trio to the resort I have mentioned, and there discovered that this man had in his employ a number of mutes, who call themselves the 'Silent Seven.' I knew that he had variously gone by the names Einstein and Devreaux, and I had every reason to believe he lived here."

As the detective progressed with his explanation the light of intelligence illuminated the gentleman's face, and when he had concluded, he broke out with the exclamation:

"It is all clear to me now. This is what my wife was driving at when she told me she had heard bad stories about me, when I came home after being unexpectedly called away into the country two days ago, but she did not tell me what it was all about, promising she would as soon as she called upon some one who was to furnish her with certain information. The man you unquestionably want is my brother-in-law, Jules Devreaux."

"Is he such a man as I describe?"

"That I am unable to say. I have seen very little of him for a year or more. He was at one time a prominent business man and well off, and at that time there was no more honorable man in the country. But a year and a half ago he failed, and then he took to gambling, I understood, and finally he and his wife, my wife's sister, disagreed and it seems he went completely to the dogs. I bought his house and furniture here, and for a long time he occupied a room, he and his wife, but about a month ago he left, and we have seen nothing of him since, although during my absence I believe he was here for awhile during the afternoon, and went away with some one who called for him in the evening, and has not been back since."

That must have been the evening on which Thad called and proposed to sell him the diamonds. But what puzzled him was the fact that Mrs. Einstein had alluded to him as her husband and had gone to call him in regard to the diamonds.

"Is Devreaux's wife here yet?" resumed Burr, after a moment of silence.

"I couldn't tell you. She is here off and on. We allow her to keep her room, and she comes and goes as she pleases, and it is sometimes days together that we see nothing of her."

"It was undoubtedly she that caused me to come here this morning, saying that you were about to sail for Europe, and that if I wished to catch you I had better be in a hurry."

Thad then related in detail the account of the woman's strange actions, and of his own adventures in connection with this strange case, down to the time of his entrance by way of the area and his subsequent mistake in arousing the young man.

Einstein laughed.

"That is just like Harriot," he commented. "She is a little touched up here," he pursued, laying his finger significantly upon his forehead. "We had her in the asylum a long time, and it was through her erratic ways that brought about the separation as much as anything else, although they have been reconciled time and again, when she would be in one of her saner moods."

"You were not aware of her actions when away from the house, I presume?"

"No, sir."

"They were queer in the extreme. She walked the streets at all times of the night, with her face covered with a heavy veil. She—I am confident now that it was she—was arrested in this place in Avenue D, and

taken before a police justice, who discharged her as being a harmless imbecile."

"That is about what she is. She has queer notions sometimes, and acts accordingly. She told my wife a few days ago that her husband was going to get fifty-thousand dollars from some one from California, and that they were going to live together again and were going abroad."

Thad opened his eyes.

"There was not so much hallucination about that as you suppose," he observed, "at least about his expectation of receiving the money, and he would have undoubtedly got it last night, only for my interference."

"How was that?"

The detective related the incident connected with the plot to kill young Morton, and of the subsequent arrest of the two lieutenants of the Jew.

"Morton? Why, that is my wife's nephew!" exclaimed Einstein. "Is he in the city?"

"Yes, he is at the Sturtevant House. This fellow has been corresponding with him in your name, and finally induced him to come on here, as I said, to purchase the half a million dollars' worth of diamonds. Now, the strange thing about this affair is, that Devreaux called upon him and the young man mistook him for yourself. How do you account for that? There is not much resemblance between you."

"No, not much, and yet when we are dressed alike there is some resemblance. We have been mistaken for each other. And then I have not seen Morton since he was a little boy, and he would probably have forgotten exactly how I looked."

"Devreaux is this fellow's real name, is it?"

"Yes. At least, I suppose so. He is a French Jew, or claims to be. He has a good deal more accent than I have, don't you think so?"

"Yes. Or rather, he has a strong Hebrew accent, while you have none."

"Well, you see I was born and brought up in this country and among Christians."

"Now, Mr. Einstein," broke off the detective suddenly, "I will have to be going, but I would have liked to have had a few words with your wife before leaving. I wonder if she is up."

"I do not know, but I will see. She is an early riser, and I know she will be glad to see you after what has happened, and she may be able to clear up some mysteries for you."

"That is why I desire to see her. By the way, I must apologize for keeping you standing here all this time in your night clothes."

"Don't mention it. It is I who should apologize for allowing you to stand all this time, but I was so upset by what you told me that I have hardly known what I was doing. Excuse me a moment and I will call my wife. By the way, won't you go down into the drawing-room? It will be pleasant there."

"Thank you, I will."

Burr descended to the drawing-room, which the house-maid was just putting to rights, and was glad enough to avail himself of the comfortable easy-chair after his long siege.

So soothing did he find it, that he was almost dropping off into a doze, when the lady entered and aroused him from his stupor. She bore a tray on which were a couple of decanters, one containing wine and the other spirits.

"Good-morning, Mr. Goldstein," she said. "You must be worn out with your long hours of work. I have some wine here and some very good whisky—at least those who use it say it is—which will you have?"

"A little wine, thanks," returned Thad, who had risen at her entrance. "I rarely take anything stronger."

"It is better," she went on as she poured out a generous glass. "You men of schemes and wiles are obliged to keep clear heads, I presume," she laughed.

"Yes, and then we are outwitted by some of the crooked fraternity occasionally. I was done for by one of them this morning, which brought me here. Here's your very good health, madam."

"Drink heartily."

Then putting the tray on a stand and

seating herself near the detective, she resumed:

"From what my husband tells me, you have been getting into a great tangle lately."

"The worst I ever got into in all my experience as a detective. I never was so bamboozled by combined coincidents and the machinations of rascals in all my life. Now, to begin with, let us get straightened out as regards our own affairs. I see now that it was not you to whom I spoke when I came to propose the alleged diamond sale."

"No, sir, that was my sister."

She told me she would send her husband down, and he came, and we went out together. He left me at the hotel, and I came back. Who was it, yourself or your sister, I met on my return?"

"It was I."

Thad's brain swam. The mystery seemed to thicken at every turn.

"I don't understand it at all," he cried in despair. "You spoke of your husband's having gone with me. How is it?"

"I can easily explain. After my sister had told her husband about the diamond affair, she came to me and told me about it, and I was astonished, as I did not know he was in the house, and then she turned it off by saying that it was not her husband, but mine, who had gone. This surprised me more than ever, for I was almost certain that my husband had not come home yet, but she stuck to it, and I believed it. I never knew any differently until I had a talk with Mr. Einstein afterward."

"It was you who came to the hotel, then?"

"Yes."

"But not you who went with me to Avenue D?"

"No. You see when I got home my husband was here and we had a talk, and he soon convinced me that my suspicions had been unfounded, and believed that you had misrepresented matters, but soon afterward my sister, who had overheard our conversation, came to me and told me that she believed it was her husband who was guilty, and she would go to the hotel and impersonate me. I agreed to this, as I would not have gone any way, and I presume she accompanied you on your slumming expedition."

"She did. And the thing is all clear now. She was careful to keep her face veiled during all the time we were together, except for a few moments while we were in a closet from the doors of which we could see the mutes. The light was dim, and, although I could see enough to discern the workings of her features at intervals, I did not see them clearly enough to lead me to suspect that she was not you."

Mrs. Einstein laughed.

"She must have played her part very cleverly to have deceived you so completely, and yet the poor girl was demented more than half the time."

"She did play her part cleverly, there is no mistake about it. Only once or twice was I ever surprised at her conduct. I was at a loss to understand her coolness after what she had discovered, but I attributed that to the disgust she must have had at finding her husband, whom she had never suspected, such a villain."

"And you say she met you at four o'clock this morning and told you that my husband and myself were about to sail for Europe?"

"Yes."

"Another of her hallucinations. She doubtless believed it as firmly as she appeared to."

CHAPTER XXIII.

METHOD IN HER MADNESS.

THAD was about to take his leave when the servant entered and announced breakfast, and his hospitable friends would not hear to his going until he had breakfasted with them.

It was a pleasant meal, and the three newly-made friends laughed over the ludicrous mistakes that had grown out of the cupidity of their wicked relative, coupled with the vaporings of the poor lunatic sister.

"Poor Harriot!" sighed Mrs. Einstein, when her sister was mentioned. "I wonder where she is now."

"I should think you would have her confined in an asylum again," observed Thad.

"So we must, poor girl," commented the lady. "It is a sin to have her wandering about in this manner."

At the conclusion of the meal, Burr took his leave, as he had to attend court that morning, the examination of Shaw and Carpenter coming on.

When he reached the Tombs police court the prisoners' names had just been called and they had been brought up from the prison-pen.

The two young men looked pale and haggard, and Shaw's air of bravado had vanished.

Morton was on hand to testify against them, and it was but a few minutes' work till it was all over, and the men were remanded for examination before the recorder. They were then led back to their cells, and Thad and young Morton left the court together.

"Your work is not completed yet, is it, Mr. Burr?" said the young man.

"No, only begun," replied the detective.

"Only begun? How is that?"

"I have only caught the lieutenants. The captain is what I am after, and he is still at large."

"Don't you think these fellows will probably peach, as the saying is?"

"Most likely. I depend a great deal upon that. The Jew treated them like slaves and they cringed to him like serfs. They are just the men to peach when they come to get squeezed themselves. But I hope to catch him before their trial comes on. What I expect of them is to help me convict him after he is caught."

"My affair was rather fortunate for you, after all, wasn't it?"

"Very much so. I would have caught these fellows sooner or later, but your affair expedited matters. By the way, I saw your aunt this morning."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At their home."

"Oh, she wasn't at the hotel, then?"

"No, I took breakfast with her and her husband this morning."

"With her husband?" cried the young man in bewilderment.

"Certainly. Why not?" and the detective laughed, for he understood the cause of Morton's consternation.

"Why, you told me just now that you wanted to arrest Einstein, and I understood by that that you did not know where he was. If you took breakfast with him, what was to hinder you from arresting him then and there?"

"You wouldn't want to arrest your host, would you?" laughed Burr. "That would be base ingratitude!"

"I know, but—"

"Don't wool-gather any more, my boy," smiled the sleuth. "I'll put you right. I have made a great discovery since I saw you, a discovery that will be pleasant to everybody except the real culprit."

"What do you mean?"

"Your uncle, Samuel Einstein, the real Einstein, is not the culprit at all."

"No?"

"No. The real culprit's name is Devreaux, a French Jew, and he has been operating under your uncle's name. He it was who wrote to you and it was he whom you met in the hotel."

"You don't tell me!" he cried, delightedly. "This is indeed, good news. But how did you make the discovery?"

"Going on the hypothesis that your uncle was the criminal, I went early this morning and procured a warrant for his arrest, and then proceeded to his house. He was not yet out of bed, and I aroused him out, and read the warrant to him. He was naturally astounded, and inquiries and explanations followed. The outcome of it all was that I discovered that the real criminal was his brother-in-law, Devreaux. And that reminds me that I must get a warrant for him. Excuse me while I go back and get it."

After procuring the warrant for the arrest of Jules Devreaux, Thad rejoined his companion, and together they went up-town.

"What is your programme for the day, Mr. Morton?" inquired Burr.

"Nothing in particular."

"Suppose you accompany me."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to call upon this friend of mine, Devreaux."

"I shall be glad to go with you. Do you know where to find him?"

"I know where he is sometimes to be found and I'll go there first, and if he is not there I will go somewhere else."

"Nothing would suit me better than a jaunt of this kind."

Thad gave instructions to his driver to take him to 300 Mulberry street, Police Headquarters.

Here the detective had a consultation with the chief, and it was decided that a detail of twenty men should be placed at his disposal.

He then returned to the cab and had himself driven to within a block of the Avenue D house, and he and his young friend alighted and awaited the arrival of the police.

He had not long to wait, when two patrol wagons, lumbered up, loaded with blue-coats.

They were under command of Captain Nolan, and were among the best men on the force.

"Remain here for a few moments, captain," instructed Burr. "I want to reconnoiter a little before we make the final raid."

"All right, detective," responded the officer. "We are here subject to your orders."

The detective then proceeded to the place, and, ascending the same stairs he had gone up the previous night, he put his ear to the door and listened.

Everything was quiet within.

"The Jew is not in that part, anyway," he remarked. "If he were, there would be talking. However, come to think of it, I don't know whom he would talk to, either, now that the young men are in the Tombs. He may be in there, after all."

Morton watched him with great interest, but said nothing.

After listening for some time again, he finally put the key which he had found would fit the lock, in and opened the door.

There were the same number of boxes scattered about the room, but no sign of life.

Leaving his wondering companion, he stole on tiptoe to the back rooms and made a thorough search of them.

"There appears to be nobody in this part of the house," he whispered. "I'll see what there is in the other."

With which he slid the panel back, stepped into the closet, and again listened.

There was not the least sound of life.

He pushed the doors open the least particle and listened again, but still could hear nothing.

All this time the young man had stood there wondering at the strange proceedings, and never opening his lips.

"My opinion is," observed the detective, returning to the young man's side, "that if they are in the house at all, they are in the back room asleep. I guess I'll risk trying a raid, anyway."

"Going after the police?" asked Morton, speaking for the first time.

"Yes."

"Why not stay here and watch and let me go?"

"That will do admirably. Go ahead."

Morton departed, and as he went out of the door Burr hurried after him and whispered:

"Tell the captain to take half of his men up that other stairway," pointing toward the down-town flat.

Thad then resumed his vigil, and in a few minutes the tramp of men on the steps outside warned him of the approach of the police.

The captain had gone with the other squad, and after waiting long enough to allow him to take up his position in the opposite hall, Burr stepped into the closet, pushed the doors open and walked out into the opposite room. He then beckoned the men to follow him, and they were soon filing through the opening.

When they had all got in, the detective closed the doors, locked them and removed the key.

"That will prevent a hasty flight," he explained.

He then led the way into the first bedroom.

The room was very dark, but he could hear breathing, and was satisfied that somebody was there, but he continued to the second bedroom, and thence to the kitchen.

By the time he was in the kitchen the ten men were strung along through the two rooms, and there he halted them.

He struck a match and lighted his lantern, and returning to the first room, flashed the light over the bed. There three of the mutes lay, and at the first flash of the light they all awoke and sprung up.

"Make them prisoners, men!" commanded Thad.

The mutes were too much panicked to offer much resistance, and were soon pinioned and handcuffed.

Burr next proceeded to the other room, where he found three more of the mutes, and the same tactics were gone through with.

But the woman and the arch-fiend were not there.

Where could they be?

It was in vain that the detective questioned the mutes on his fingers.

They only shook their heads, shrugged their shoulders and grinned as much as to say: "You've got us, but not the boss."

Accompanied by the captain and a couple of the men, the detective made a thorough search, not only of the two top flats, but all the tenements in the building, but in vain.

The right man was nowhere to be found. Neither was the mysterious woman.

"Well, we may as well go with what we've got, captain," commented Burr. "Maybe he'll turn up somewhere else."

"Yes, if he hasn't given you the slip," rejoined the officer.

"Yes, if he hasn't given me the slip," echoed Thad.

And he was troubled with a misgiving, that there might be some truth in the prediction, as he recalled what Mrs. Devreaux had told him that morning about the Jew's intention of sailing for Europe.

The prisoners were marched to the street and loaded into the patrol wagons and driven away.

Burr did not accompany them, and as the wagons rolled away he stood reflecting for some moments what move he should make next.

Morton took a cab and returned to his hotel.

Burr was not much elated over the capture of the mere assistants or tools of the arch-fiend, the Jew, and could not but upbraid himself that he had thus far failed in his purpose.

After going over the situation pretty thoroughly he felt that perhaps he had not been thorough enough in his search of the two flats, and that either the Jew or the woman, or both of them might still be lurking there.

Accordingly he returned with a view to going over the ground once more.

As the door of the down-town side flat was still unfastened, he went up that way, and was soon engaged in searching the apartments for any trace of the game.

It did not take him long to complete this simple task, and with the result of finding nothing more than he had on the previous occasion, minus the mutes.

He returned to the front room and was about to unlock the closet doors with a view to passing through into the next flat, when he was surprised by a sharp knock on the inside of the doors.

Whoever the person was had come through the secret passage and was then in the closet.

Thad hesitated about opening the doors, for if it should chance to be the Jew, he would undoubtedly be prepared to meet the detective, and would have him at a decided disadvantage, and moreover, in his present stress, the Jew would hesitate at nothing.

While he was thus ruminating the knock was repeated, more vigorously than before, and Burr felt more fully convinced than ever that it was the outlaw.

The fellow was evidently not yet aware that his gang was in custody and expected to find them in this place, and the detective concluded to open the door and face him.

Drawing his revolver and holding it in one

hand ready for immediate use, he put the key into the lock and turned it.

He had no more than done so, when the doors were forced open and the Jew's wife stepped out before him.

Thad was on the impulse of pulling the trigger, but recognized her in time and lowered his weapon.

The woman was greatly surprised to see Thad there, as, indeed, he was at seeing her.

They stood staring at each other for some moments before either spoke, and then the woman burst out in a wild laugh.

"You didn't find hubby at the house this morning, did you, Mr. Detective?" she laughed.

Burr was too much angered by the taunt to reply at once, but he soon overcame his passion, and answered:

"No, you succeeded in hoodwinking me that time, my good woman, but it will be your last trick, mind that!"

This only had the effect of provoking another fit of laughter that lasted for some minutes, and as soon as she was able to control her voice she said:

"Going to lock me up, too, are you?"

"That's what I'm going to do."

"All right," she rejoined, with another laugh. "That won't hurt me. Besides, they won't keep me long."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because they think I'm crazy."

"But you are not, eh?"

"No more than you are. Nevertheless, the police and the judges and the doctors think I am, and that is the same thing."

"But you may not get off so easily this time."

"Oh, yes, I will," she smiled.

"I may have something to say in that."

"What can you say that would influence them?" she snapped, in an angry tone.

"I might tell them that you had confessed to me that you were not insane."

"That would have no bearing. The craziest person you ever saw claimed to be sane. It's one of the strongest indications of insanity when a person insists upon his sanity."

Thad knew this to be a fact, and decided to change the subject of the conversation.

"What was your motive for deceiving me as you did this morning?" he asked.

This inquiry started her to laughing afresh, and it was some time before she could answer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RIGHT MAN AT LAST.

As soon as the woman was able to control herself she replied:

"Why, couldn't you guess what my motive was in playing the little trick on you?"

"No, unless it was to throw me off the real scent and allow your precious husband to escape," growled the detective.

"That was it exactly."

"And has he escaped?"

"Most certainly. As I told you, he was to sail for abroad to-day, and by this time he is doubtless on the sea."

"I believe as much of that as I do about Einstein's going and taking his wife with him. There was no truth in that story, and I see no reason for crediting this one."

"Suit yourself about that. It is true, just the same, and you will never set eyes on him again."

"I shall have to have better proof before I accept the story," he retorted. "But never mind about him now. I will run him down if he is on American soil, and if he is not, I won't, that's all. I want to ask you something about these mutes. How many are there of them altogether?"

To Thad's surprise she appeared to find something to laugh at even in this simple question.

"Are there six or seven?" he demanded, impatiently.

"There are six and there are seven," she rejoined, still laughing.

"How do you make that out?"

"There are six mutes and one that played mute whenever it suited her purpose."

"That is the woman, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And she sometimes assumed the character of a man, didn't she?"

"Yes, when it suited her purpose."

"What has become of her?"

The woman appeared to find this extremely funny and laughed immoderately at it.

"Do you know what has become of her?" he demanded savagely.

"Yes—at least I could guess."

"Well?"

There was a mischievous twinkle in her eye, but she made no response.

"Tell me where she is, please," he implored in a kindlier voice. "It can make no difference to you now that the others are all under arrest."

"It might make a good deal of difference," she laughed.

"How so?"

"I might have a personal interest in that woman."

The detective looked at her with a bewildered expression. All of a sudden a light burst upon him.

"I understand it now," he declared.

"You do?"

"Yes. You are that pretended mute, yourself!"

Again she roared with laughter.

"What an excellent guesser you are, to be sure," she cried. "How came you to guess so well?"

"Am I not right?"

She hesitated.

"Will it go any harder with me if I tell the truth?" she finally asked.

"No. On the contrary, it will make it easier for you. I shall use all my influence in your behalf in case you tell the whole truth about this matter."

"Will you?" she cried eagerly.

"I will."

"Well, then, it was I who impersonated the deaf and dumb woman. It was I who released you and saved your life on two different occasions, and it was I whom the police arrested, and I whom the judge acquitted as a harmless lunatic."

Thad was loth to believe this assertion at first, especially after what he had discovered concerning her habit of stretching the truth to such a degree. But when he came to reflect, it seemed impossible that she should have been acquainted with all the details of which she spoke unless she were the same woman. But then to convince him the more fully, while he was still pondering the matter she interrupted him by saying:

"I see you do not believe me. Well, I'll convince you."

And she went on in detail to describe the events attending the two liberations, which could have been known to no one but the person who had acted as his deliverer.

At the conclusion she asked with a bland smile:

"Do you believe me now?"

"Yes, I am compelled to believe you now," he replied, still with a perplexed countenance. "But there is one puzzling point yet."

"What is that?"

"The man whom I saw here and the woman who rescued me bore a striking resemblance to each other, and neither of them resembled you in the least."

"They were not as good-looking as I am, eh?" she laughed.

"No. And what is more, they were at least twenty years older than you are."

"They appeared to be, you mean. You are something of an artist in the line of making up yourself," she smiled. "Why not I? You think it strange that I should have been able to impersonate a person of forty-five. Why, I can make up to represent eighty just as easily. I did not spend eight years on the stage for nothing."

"It was yourself, made up, then, eh?"

"Yes. What are you going to do with me?"

Thad reflected.

"Do you not think that I am entitled to some mercy for what I did for you?" she went on.

"I do indeed, and I was just thinking whether I hadn't better let you off entirely for your kindness. I shall do so, if you will tell me how you came to take this interest in me, knowing as you did, that my mission in this place was to catch your husband."

"You never could guess," she replied, reflectively.

"I certainly could not. What was it?"

"I had a motive for my action."

"What was it?" he persisted.

"As I told you before, my husband has shamefully mistreated me, notwithstanding all I have sacrificed on his account, and although I still love him, there are times when I would be glad to see him suffer for his crimes. This was one of the times. He had beaten me the very day previous to your entrance to the flat through the back window and found me here, and still stinging under the infliction and burning with resentment, I determined that you should not be hampered in your project to catch him, if I could prevent it."

"It was very generous of you. But knowing, as you do, of his criminal character, and knowing that he only needs an opportunity to repeat his cruelties, why do you still shield him?"

"I do not."

"You refuse to tell me where he is."

"I have told you, as nearly as I know. He told me that he was going to leave the country to-day, and I know no more."

"But you deceived me in order that he might escape without my interference."

"I know I did. But you cannot blame me for that. You would do the same thing to save any one you love."

"Not if that one were in the habit of beating me."

"That is because you are not a woman. A woman's love is entirely different from a man's. A man will sometimes do foolish things for his love, but a woman will die for hers."

"You still love this man, then?"

"Yes."

"And would protect him if it were in your power?"

"I would."

"I cannot understand you."

"And will arrest me, eh?"

"No. I have promised that I would not, but I would like to persuade you to go back to your sister and let this man, who is unworthy of your sympathy, go."

"That I can never do. It was my last visit to her house this morning, and I never intend that she shall see me again, at least while I live."

"Why?"

"Because she and her husband have not treated me right. Don't ask me how, for I won't tell you. But they have not treated me right, and I shall never go near them again."

"What will you do, now that your husband has left you?"

"I do not know, and care as little. No one cares for me, and why should I care for anybody, or for myself?"

The instant she ceased speaking she turned abruptly about and darted like a flash through the closet and secret passage and disappeared into the next room.

As he did not intend arresting her anyway, the detective did not follow her, and a moment later left the room. He had only reached the hall, however, and had not begun the descent of the stairs, when something seemed to tell him that he should look after the poor, miserable woman and see that she did not do herself any injury. The more he pondered the matter the more deeply he became impressed with the recollection of a strange expression she had in her eyes as she left him.

He hastened back, passed through the secret entrance to the next flat and looked about for the woman, but could see nothing of her. He visited all the rooms, and still she was not to be found. He was about to take leave of the place for the last time, when he was attracted by a stifled groan that appeared to emanate from the very wall at his side. He turned in the direction, when to his surprise he observed what had escaped his notice up to that moment, a door or panel in the wall where he would have least expected to find such a thing, and would not have noticed it now had it not been slightly open.

He threw the door wide open, and there, lying on the floor in an unconscious state, was the poor insane woman. He lifted her in his arms and carried her out into the room, but he could not fail to see that she was breathing her last.

He hastened from the place and, finding a policeman, had him send in a call for an ambulance, and when it arrived, had her

taken to the hospital, accompanying the ambulance himself. The woman was dead, however, when they reached the hospital. She had taken her own life with poison.

Burr went at once to the Einstein residence and informed the dead woman's sister of what had occurred, and then went home.

He was so completely exhausted from his long siege that he was compelled to lie down and take a rest before resuming his task of unearthing the Jew and his little game.

After taking some refreshments and a few hours' rest, he made a change in his disguise and sallied forth again.

He was made up as an ordinary business man this time, and wore a derby hat.

Walking as far as Broadway, he took a down-town car, and got off at Grand street.

From here he strolled along Grand street till he came to the number —. The police still had the place under surveillance, and he made a few inquiries.

"Anybody been about the place since, officer?" he asked, after first making himself known to the policeman.

"Not a soul, while I was on," replied the other. "I guess they've given it the shake."

"It's about time. However, I think I'll take a run up and see how things look upstairs."

He climbed the four flights of stairs and opened the door.

There was no change. It was evident that nobody had been there since his last visit, as there was not a thing moved from its position.

After going over the place thoroughly, he again returned to the street.

Burr was almost disheartened.

"Although he had gathered the last of the gang, the leader, the one above all others he wished to secure, was still at large. And what was worse, every clue had slipped away from him.

He saw now that he had made a grievous error in not putting more faith in what the crazy woman had told him about the Jew going abroad. After all, there might have been a good deal of truth in the story, but it was too late now to think of it. He was doubtless on the high seas ere this, and the detective cursed himself as little better than a fool for allowing him to slip away, when he might have taken him so easily by following her advice, lunatic though she was.

Thus he communed with himself as he strolled along, and the more he thought of his blunder the more bitter became his thoughts.

His head was bent and his eyes were upon the ground. He was blind and oblivious to all about him.

How far he had walked thus he knew not, and cared as little, when he was suddenly startled by a familiar voice addressing him.

He looked up, and before scanning his accoster, he cast his eyes about and saw that he was in front of a dry-goods store.

"Excuse me, sir," said the voice, "but is your name Rhodes?"

Thad turned his eyes upon the Jew, and he could not have been more astonished if he had seen his Satanic Majesty standing before him.

The man was none other than Jules Devreaux, known to the police as Sheeny Sam!

He was too much astonished to speak for an instant. Meanwhile the Jew, who evidently mistook him for an intended victim from the interior, approached still nearer, and, placing his hand upon Burr's arm, continued:

"Am I mistaken, mine friend, or ish dis Mr. Rhodes from Abeline, Kansas?"

"You are a trifle mistaken, my friend," replied Thad, now thoroughly awake to the situation. "My name is Thaddeus Burr, and if I am not mistaken, this is Jules Devreaux, otherwise known as Sheeny Sam. You are my prisoner!"

And the detective unrolled the warrant which he had been thoughtlessly carrying in his hand.

The Jew was thunderstruck.

He sprang back and stared at Thad as though his eyes would burst from their sockets.

"You vas mistaken, mine friend," he finally made out to gasp. "My name ish—"

"That's all right, old fellow," interrupted Burr, seizing him by the wrist and snapping

one of the handcuffs on. "You'll have plenty of time to think over several new names before you get through with the judge."

And before the astonished rogue recovered from his astonishment, Thad had the other wristlet snapped on.

"We'll take a walk to the Tombs now, my good fellow," observed Burr as he started his prisoner along.

The superintendent was wild with delight when he heard what Thad had accomplished, and slapping him on the shoulder, cried enthusiastically:

"There is no use in talking, old fellow, there is not a man on the face of the globe who can cope with you in running a criminal to earth!"

THE END.

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